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THE

WORKS

OF

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LATE

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PREFACE.

THE following Sermons, as to the substance, (for most of them are considerablv abridged,) were preached to a public and numerous assembly; and, therefore, an accurate and logical discussion of the several subjects was not aimed at. They are rather popular discourses, in which the author, though he wished not to treat the politer part of his auditory with disrespect, thought it likewise his duty, so to adapt his manner to the occasion, as to be intelligible to persons of weak capacities, and in the lower ranks of life. He conceives himself to be a debtor to every class of his hearers, and that he ought to endeavour to please all men, with a view to their edification; but further than this, not to be greatly affected, either by their approbation or by their censure.

Many of the subjects are so nearly coincident, that repetitions could not be always avoided, without the appearance of affectation. Besides, as it may be expected, that in a large congregation there are always some persons present for the first time; with respect to these, an observation may be new, though, perhaps, the more stated hearers may recollect its having been mentioned before. For a similar reason, such repetitions are not improper in print. Many persons read part of a book, who may not have opportunity or inclination to read the whole. Should any one, by opening these Sermons at a venture, meet with a passage which, by a divine blessing, may either awaken a careless, or heal a wounded spirit, that passage will be exactly in the right page, even though the purport of it should be expressed in several other places. Further, since we do not always so much stand in need of new information, as to have what we already know more effectually impressed upon the mind; there are truths which can scarcely be inculcated

too often, at least until the design for which they were mentioned *once* be effectually answered. Thus, when the strokes of a hammer are often repeated, not one of them can be deemed superfluous; the last, which drives the nail to the head, being no less necessary than any of those which preceded it.

From those readers, whose habits of thinking on religious subjects are formed by a close attachment to particular systems of divinity, the author requests a candid construction of what he advances, if he ventures in some instances to deviate a little more from the beaten track. If he is sometimes constrained to differ from the judgment of wise and good men, who have deserved well of the church of God, he would do it with modesty. Far from depreciating their labours, he would be thankful for the benefit which he hopes he has received from them. It is a great satisfaction to him, that in all doctrinal points of primary importance, his views are confirmed by the suffrage of writers and ministers eminent for genuine piety and sound learning; who assisted him in his early inquiries after truth, and at whose feet he is still willing to sit. Yet, remembering that he is authorized and commanded to call no man *master*, so as to yield an implicit and unqualified submission to human teachers; while he gladly borrows every help he can from others, he ventures likewise to think for himself. His leading sentiments concerning the grand peculiarities of the Gospel were formed many years since, when he was in a state of almost entire seclusion from society; when he had scarcely any religious book but the Bible within his reach: and had no knowledge, either of the various names, parties, and opinions, by which Christians were distinguished and divided, or of the controversies which subsisted among them. He is not conscious that any very material difference has taken place in his sentiments since he first became acquainted with the religious world; but, after a long course of experience and observation, he seems to possess them in a different manner. The difficulties which, for a

season, perplexed him on some points, are either removed, or considerably abated. On the other hand, he now perceives difficulties that constrain him to lay his hand upon his mouth, in subjects which once appeared to him obvious and plain. Thus, if he mistakes not himself, he is less troubled with scepticism, and at the same time less disposed to be dogmatical, than he formerly was. He feels himself unable to draw the line, with precision, between those essential points which ought to be earnestly contended for, (in a spirit of meekness,) as for the faith once delivered to the saints; and certain secondary positions, concerning which good men may safely differ, and wherein, perhaps, we cannot reasonably expect them to be unanimous during the present state of imperfection. But if the exact boundary cannot be marked with certainty, he thinks it both desirable and possible, to avoid the extremes into which men of warm tempers have often been led.

Not that the author can be an advocate for that indifference to truth, which, under the specious semblance of *moderation* and *candour*, offers a comprehension, from which none are excluded, but those who profess and aim to worship God in the spirit, to rejoice in Christ Jesus, and to renounce all confidence in the flesh. *Moderation* is a Christian grace: it differs much from that tame, unfeeling, neutrality between truth and error, which is so prevalent in the present day. As the different rays of light which, when separated by a prism, exhibit the various colours of the rainbow, form, in their combination, a perfect and resplendent *white*, in which every colour is incorporated; so, if the graces of the Holy Spirit were complete in us, the result of their combined effect would be a truly candid, moderate, and liberal spirit towards our brethren. The Christian, especially he who is advanced and established in the life of faith, has a fervent zeal for God, for the honour of his name, his law, and his Gospel. The honest warmth which he feels, when such a law is broken, such a Gospel is despised, and when the great and glorious name of the Lord his God is profaned, would,

by the occasion of his infirmities, often degenerate into anger or contempt towards those who oppose themselves, if he was under the influence of zeal only. But his zeal is blended with benevolence and humility: it is softened by a consciousness of his own frailty and fallibility. He is aware that his knowledge is very limited in itself, and very faint in its efficacy; that his attainments are weak and few, compared with his deficiencies; that his gratitude is very disproportionate to his obligations, and his obedience unspeakably short of conformity to his prescribed rule; that he has nothing but what he has received, and has received nothing but what, in a greater or less degree, he has misapplied and misimproved. He is, therefore, a debtor to the mercy of God, and lives upon his multiplied forgiveness. And he makes the gracious conduct of the Lord towards himself a pattern for his own conduct towards his fellow-creatures. He cannot boast, nor is he forward to censure. He considers himself, lest he also be tempted*; and thus he learns tenderness and compassion to others, and to bear patiently with those mistakes, prejudices, and prepossessions *in them*, which once belonged to his own character; and from which, as yet, he is but imperfectly freed. But then, the same considerations which inspire him with meekness and gentleness towards those who oppose the truth, strengthen his regard for the *truth* itself, and his conviction of its importance. For the sake of peace, which he loves and cultivates, he accommodates himself, as far as he lawfully can, to the weakness and misapprehensions of those who mean well; though he is thereby exposed to the censure of bigots of all parties, who deem him flexible and wavering, like a reed shaken with the wind. But there are other points nearly connected with the honour of God, and essential to the life of faith, which are the foundations of his hope, and the sources of his joy. For his firm attachment to these, he is content to be treated as a bigot himself. For here he is immoveable as an iron pillar; nor can either the fear or

* Gal. vi. 1.

the favour of man prevail on him to give place, no, not for an hour *. Here his judgment is fixed; and he expresses it in simple and unequivocal language, so as not to leave either friends or enemies in suspense, concerning the side which he has chosen, or the cause which is nearest to his heart.

The minister who possesses a candour thus enlightened, and thus qualified, will neither degrade himself to be the *instrument*, nor aspire to be the *head*, of a party. He will not servilely tread in the paths prescribed him by men, however respectable. He will not multiply contentions, in defence either of the *shibboleths* of others, or of any *nostrum* of his own, under a pretence that he is pleading for the cause of God and truth. His attention will not be restrained to the credit or interest of any detached denomination of Christians, but extended to all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. On the other hand, knowing that the Gospel is the wisdom and power of God, and the only possible mean by which fallen man can obtain either peace or rectitude, he most cordially embraces and avows it. Far from being ashamed of it, he esteems it his glory. He preaches Christ Jesus the Lord, and him crucified. He dares not sophisticate†, disguise, or soften the great doctrines of the grace of God, to render them more palatable to the depraved taste of the times. He disdains the thought. And he will no more encounter the prejudices and corrupt maxims and practices of the world with any weapon but *the truth as it is in Jesus*‡, than he would venture to fight an enraged enemy with a wooden sword.

Such is the disposition which the author wishes for himself, and which he would endeavour to cultivate in others. He hopes that nothing of a contrary tendency will be found in the volumes now presented to the public. MESSIAH, the great subject of the Oratorio, is the leading and principal subject of every sermon. His person, grace, and glory; his matchless

* Gal. ii. 5. † 2 Cor. iv. 2. ‡ Eph. iv. 21.

love to sinners; his humiliation, sufferings, and death; his ability and willingness to save to the uttermost; his kingdom, and the present and future happiness of his willing people, are severally considered, according to the order suggested by the series of texts. Nearly connected with these topics, are the doctrines of the fall, and depravity of man, the agency of the Holy Spirit, and the nature and necessity of regeneration, and of that holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord. On these subjects the author is not afraid of contradiction from those who are taught of God.

With respect to some other points which incidentally occur, he has endeavoured so to treat them as to avoid administering fuel to the flame of angry controversy. He is persuaded himself, and shall be happy to persuade his readers, that the remaining differences of opinion among those who truly understand and cordially believe the declarations of Scripture on the preceding articles, are neither so wide nor so important as they have been sometimes represented. Many of these differences are nearly verbal, and would cease, if due allowance was made for the imperfection of human language, and the effects of an accustomed phraseology, which often lead people to affix different ideas to the same expressions, or to express the same ideas in different words. And if, in some things, we cannot exactly agree, since we confess that we are all weak and fallible, mutual patience and forbearance would be equally becoming the acknowledgments we make, and the Gospel which we profess. We should thereby act in character, as the followers of Him who was compassionate to the infirmities and mistakes of his disciples, and taught them, not every thing at once, but gradually, as they were able to bear.

The author ought not to be very solicitous upon his own account, what reception his performance may meet with. The fashion of this world is passing away. The voice, both of applause and of censure, will soon be stifled in the dust. It is,

therefore, but a small thing to be judged of man's judgment*. But conscious of the vast importance of the subject which he thus puts into the reader's hands, he cannot take leave of him without earnestly entreating his serious attention. The one principle which he assumes for granted, and which he is certain cannot be disproved, is, that the *Bible is a revelation from God*. By this standard he is willing that whatever he has advanced may be tried. If the Bible be true, we must all give an account, each one of himself, to the great and final Judge. That when we shall appear before his awful tribunal, we may be found at his right hand, accepted in the Beloved, is the author's fervent prayer, both for his readers and for himself.

* 1 Cor. iv. 6.

LONDON,
15th April, 1786.

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MESSIAH:

FIFTY EXPOSITORY DISCOURSES,

ON THE SERIES OF

SCRIPTURAL PASSAGES,

WHICH FORM THE SUBJECT OF THE CELEBRATED

ORATORIO OF HANDEL.

PREACHED IN THE YEARS 1784 AND 1785,

IN THE PARISH CHURCH OF ST. MARY WOOLNOTH, LOMBARD-STREET.

———————————Ah!
Tantamne rem tam negligenter agere! TER.
Unum pro multis dabitur caput. VIRG.

For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.

2 COR. v. 14, 15.

Oh, that they were wise, that they understood this! DEUT. xxxii. 29.

TO THE PARISHIONERS

OF

ST. MARY WOOLNOTH AND ST. MARY WOOLCHURCH HAW,

LONDON,

THESE SERMONS

ON

THE MESSIAH,

ARE AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED BY

THE AUTHOR;

TO REMAIN

AS A TESTIMONY OF HIS RESPECT FOR THEIR PERSONS,

AND

HIS SOLICITUDE FOR THEIR WELFARE,

WHEN HIS PRESENT RELATION TO THEM,

AS THEIR MINISTER,

SHALL BE DISSOLVED.

MESSIAH.

SERMON I.

THE CONSOLATION.

Isaiah xl. 1, 2.

Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received at the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

THE particulars of the great mystery of godliness, as enumerated by the apostle Paul, constitute the grand and inexhaustible theme of the Gospel Ministry, "God "manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of "angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the "world, received up into glory*." It is my wish and purpose to know nothing among you but this subject; to preach nothing to you but what has a real connexion with the doctrine of Jesus Christ and him crucified, and with the causes and effects of his obedience unto death, even the death of the cross. But a regard to the satisfaction and advantage of my stated hearers, has often made me desirous of adopting some plan, which might lead me to exhibit the principal outlines of the Saviour's character and mediation in a regular series of discourses; so as to form, if not a picture, at least a

* 1 Tim. iii. 16.

slight sketch, of those features of his glory and of his grace, which endear him to the hearts of his people. Such a plan has lately, and rather unexpectedly, occurred to me. Conversation in almost every company, for some time past, has much turned upon the commemoration of Handel; the grand musical entertainments, and particularly his Oratorio of the *Messiah*, which have been repeatedly performed on that occasion in Westminster Abbey. If it could be reasonably hoped that the performers and the company assembled to hear the music, or the greater part, or even a very considerable part of them, were capable of entering into the spirit of the subject; I will readily allow that the *Messiah*, executed in so masterly a manner, by persons whose hearts, as well as their voices and instruments, were tuned to the Redeemer's praise; accompanied with the grateful emotions of an audience duly affected with a sense of their obligations to his love; might afford one of the highest and noblest gratifications, of which we are capable in the present life. But they who love the Redeemer, and therefore delight to join in his praise, if they did not find it convenient, or think it expedient, to hear the *Messiah* at Westminster, may comfort themselves with the thought, that, in a little time, they shall be still more abundantly gratified. Ere long, death shall rend the vail which hides eternal things from their view, and introduce them to that unceasing song and universal chorus, which are even now performing before the throne of God and the Lamb. Till then, I apprehend, that true Christians, without the assistance of either vocal or instrumental music, may find greater pleasure in a humble contemplation on the *words* of the *Messiah*, than they can derive from the utmost effort of musical genius. This therefore is the plan I spoke

of. I mean to lead your meditations to the language of the Oratorio, and to consider in their order, (if the Lord, on whom our breath depends, shall be pleased to afford life, ability, and opportunity,) the several sublime and interesting passages of Scripture, which are the basis of that admired composition.

If he shall condescend to smile upon the attempt, pleasure and profit will go hand in hand. There is no *harmony* to a heaven-born soul like that which is the result of the combination and coincidence of all the Divine Attributes and Perfections, manifested in the work of redemption; mercy and truth meeting together, inflexible righteousness corresponding with the peace of offenders, God glorious, and sinners saved. There is no *melody* upon earth to be compared with the voice of the blood of Jesus speaking peace to a guilty conscience, or with the voice of the Holy Spirit applying the promises to the heart, and sweetly inspiring a temper of confidence and adoption. These are joys which the world can neither give nor take away, which never pall upon the mind by continuance or repetition; the sense of them is always *new*, the recollection of them is always pleasant. Nor do they only satisfy, but sanctify the soul. They strengthen faith, animate hope, add fervency to love, and both dispose and enable the Christian to run in all the paths of holy obedience with an enlarged heart.

The *Messiah* of Handel consists of three parts. The first, contains prophecies of his advent and the happy consequences, together with the angel's message to the shepherds, informing them of his birth, as related by St. Luke. The second part describes his passion, death, resurrection, and ascension; his taking possession of his kingdom of glory, the commencement of his kingdom

of grace upon the earth, and the certain disappointment and ruin of all who persist in opposition to his will. The third part expresses the blessed fruit and consummation of his undertaking, in the deliverance of his people from sin, sorrow, and death, and in making them finally victorious over all their enemies. The triumphant song of the redeemed, to the praise of the Lamb, who bought them with his own blood, closes the whole. The arrangement or series of these passages is so judiciously disposed, so well connected, and so fully comprehends all the principal truths of the Gospel, that I shall not attempt either to alter or to enlarge it. The exordium or introduction which I have read to you from the prophecy of Isaiah, is very happily chosen.

If, as some eminent commentators suppose, the prophet had any reference, in this passage, to the return of Israel from Babylon into their own land, his principal object was undoubtedly of much greater importance. Indeed their deliverance from captivity, and their state afterwards as a nation, do not appear to correspond with the magnificent images employed in the following verses. For though they rebuilt their city and temple, they met with many insults and much opposition, and continued to be a tributary and dependant people. I shall therefore waive the consideration of this sense.

The eye of the prophet's mind seems to be chiefly fixed upon one august Personage, who was approaching to enlighten and bless a miserable world; and before he describes the circumstances of his appearance, he is directed to comfort the mourners in Zion, with an assurance, that this great event would fully compensate them for all their sorrows. The state of Jerusalem, the representative name of the people of God, was very low in Isaiah's time. The people, who in the days of

Solomon were attached to the service of God, honoured with signal tokens of his presence and favour, and raised to the highest pitch of temporal prosperity, were now degenerated; the gold was become dim, and the fine gold changed. Iniquity abounded, judgments were impending, yet insensibility and security prevailed, and the words of many were stout against the Lord But there were a few who feared the Lord, whose eyes affected their hearts, and who mourned for the evils which they could not prevent. These, and these only, were, in strictness of speech, the people of the Lord, and to these the message of comfort is addressed. Speak to Jerusalem comfortably, speak *to her heart*, (as the Hebrew word is,) to her very case, and tell her that there is a balm for all her wounds, a cordial for all her griefs, in this one consideration, MESSIAH is at hand. In the prophetic style things future are described as present, and that which the mouth of the Lord has spoken of as sure to take place, is considered as already done. Thus the prophet, rapt into future times, contemplates the manifestation of MESSIAH, the accomplishment of his great undertaking, and all the happy consequences of his obedience unto death for men, as though he stood upon the spot, and with John, the harbinger of our Lord (whose appearance he immediately describes,) was pointing with his finger to the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world.

This comfortable message consists of two parts. First, the removal of evil; her warfare is accomplished, her iniquity is pardoned. Secondly, A promise of good more than equivalent to all her afflictions; she hath received at the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

I. Two ideas are included in the original term translated *warfare*.

1. A state of service connected with hardship, like that of the military life*.

2. An appointed time, as it is rendered in Job†.

These ideas equally apply to the Mosaic dispensation. The spirit of that institution was comparatively a spirit of bondage, distance, and fear; and the state of the church while under the law, is resembled by the apostle to that of a minor, who though he be an heir, is under tutors and governors, and differeth but little from a servant, until the time appointed of the Father‡. The ceremonial law, with respect to its inefficacy, is styled *weak*, and with respect to the long train of its multiplied, expensive, difficult, and repeated appointments, a *yoke and burden*. But it was only for a prescribed time. The gospel was designed to supersede it, and to introduce a state of life, power, liberty, and confidence. The blackness and darkness, the fire and tempest, and other circumstances of terror attendant on the promulgation of the law at Mount Sinai §, which not only struck the people with dismay, but caused even Moses himself to say, "I exceedingly fear and quake," were expressive of its design; which was not to lead the people of Israel to expect peace and hope from their best obedience to that covenant, but rather to convince them of the necessity of a better covenant established upon better promises, and to direct their hopes to MESSIAH, who was prefigured by all their sacrifices, and who in the fulness of time was to make a complete atonement for sin, by the sacrifice of himself. Then their legal figurative constitution would cease, the shadows give place to the substance, and the true worship-

* Numb. i. 3. † Job vii. 1. and xiv. 14.
‡ Gal. iv. 1—4. § Heb. xii. 18—22.

pers of God would be instructed, enabled, and encouraged to worship him in spirit and in truth; no more as servants, but in the temper of adoption, as the children of God by faith in the son of his love.

There is a considerable analogy to this difference between the Law and the Gospel, as contradistinguished from each other, in the previous distress of a sinner, when he is made sensible of his guilt and danger as a transgressor of the law of God, and the subsequent peace which he obtains by believing the Gospel. The good seed of the word of grace can only take root and flourish in a soil duly prepared. And this preparation of the heart*, without which all that is read or heard concerning MESSIAH produces no permanent good effect, is wholly from the Lord. The first good work of the Holy Spirit, upon the heart of fallen man, is to convince of sin†. He gives some due impressions of the majesty and holiness of the God with whom we have to do, of our dependence upon him, of our obligations to him as our Creator, Lawgiver, and Benefactor; then we begin to form our estimate of duty, of sin and its desert, not from the prevalent maxims and judgment of mankind around us, but from the unerring standard of Scripture. Thence new and painful apprehensions arise—the lofty looks of man are humbled, his haughtiness is brought low, his mouth stopped, or only opened to confess his guilt and vileness, and to cry for mercy. He now feels himself, under the law; it condemns him, and he cannot reply; it commands him, and he cannot obey. He has neither righteousness nor strength, and must sink into despair, were it not that he is now qualified to hearken to the Gospel with other ears, and to read the Scriptures with other

* Prov. xvi. 1. † John xvi. 9.

eyes, (if I may so speak,) than he once did. He now knows he is sick, and therefore knows his need of a physician. This state of anxiety, conflict, and fear, which keeps comfort from his heart, and perhaps slumber from his eyes, is often of long continuance. There is no common standard whereby to determine either the degree or the duration. Both differ in different persons; and as the body and the mind have a strong and reciprocal influence upon each other, it is probable the difference observable in such cases may in part depend upon constitutional causes. However, the time is a prescribed time, and though not subject to any rules or reasonings of ours, is limited and regulated by the wisdom of God. He wounds, and he heals in his own appointed moment. None that continue waiting upon him, and seeking salvation in the means which he has directed, shall be finally disappointed. Sooner or later he gives them, according to his promise, beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness*. This warfare is accomplished, when they rightly understand, and cordially believe the following clause:

"Her iniquity is pardoned." Though the sacrifices under the law had an immediate and direct effect to restore the offender for whom they were offered, to the privileges pertaining to the people of Israel considered as a nation or commonwealth, they could not of themselves cleanse the conscience from guilt. It is a dictate of right reason, no less than of revelation, that it is not possible, that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sin†. For this purpose the blood of Christ had a retrospective efficacy, and was the only ground of consolation for a convinced sinner from the beginning of the world. He

* Isa. lxi. 3. † Heb. x. 4.

was proposed to our first parents as the seed of the woman who should bruise the serpent's head*. In this seed Abraham believed, and was justified; and all of every age who were justified were partakers of Abraham's faith. Therefore the apostle teaches us, that when God set him forth as a propitiation through faith in his blood, he declared his righteousness in the remission of sins that were past†. For though we may suppose God would have declared his *mercy* in forgiving sin upon any terms, no consideration but the death of his Son could have exhibited his *righteousness*—that is, his holiness, justice, and truth, in the pardon of sin. True penitents and believers were pardoned and saved *under* the law, but not *by* the law. Their faith looked through all the legal institutions to him who was represented and typified by them. But the types which revealed him, in a sense concealed him likewise. So that though Abraham saw his day, and rejoiced, and a succession of the servants of God foresaw his glory and his sufferings, and spake of him; yet in general the church of the Old Testament rather desired and longed for, than actually possessed, that fulness of light and knowledge concerning the person, offices, love, and victory of MESSIAH, which is the privilege of those who enjoy and believe the Gospel‡. Yet great discoveries of these things were vouchsafed to some of the prophets, particularly to Isaiah, who, on account of the clearness of his views of the Redeemer and his kingdom, has been sometimes styled a fifth Evangelist. The most evangelical part of his prophecy, or at least that part in which he prosecutes the subject with the least interruption, begins with this chapter and with this verse. And he proposes it for the comfort of

* Gen. iii. 15. † Rom. iii. 25. ‡ Heb. xi. 39, 40.

the mourners in Zion in his day. *We* know that the Son of God, of whom Moses and the prophets spake, is actually come*; that the atonement for sin is made, the ransom for sinners paid and accepted. Now the shadows are past, the vail removed, the night is ended, the dawn, the day is arrived, yea, the Sun of Righteousness is arisen with healing in his beams†. God is reconciled in his Son, and the ministers of the Gospel are now authorized to preach comfort to all who mourn under a sense of sin, to tell them all manner of sin is forgiven for the Redeemer's sake, and that the iniquity of those who believe in him is freely and abundantly pardoned.

II. Though the last clause of the verse does not belong to the passage, as selected for the Oratorio, it is so closely connected with the subject, that I am not willing to omit it. "She has received at the Lord's hand dou-"ble for all her sins." The meaning here cannot be, that her afflictions had already been more, and greater, than her sins had deserved. The just desert of sin cannot be received in the present life, for the wages of sin is death and the curse of the law, or in the apostle's words, everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and the glory of his power‡. Therefore a living man can have no reason to complain under the heaviest sufferings. If we acknowledge ourselves to be sinners, we have likewise cause to acknowledge, that he hath not dealt with us according to our iniquities. Nor can the words be so applied to MESSIAH as to intimate, that even his sufferings were more than necessary, or greater than the exigence of the case required. The efficacy of his atonement is indeed greater than the actual application, and sufficient to save the whole race of mankind if they truly

* 1 John v. 20. † Mal. iv. 2. ‡ 2 Thess. i. 9.

believed in the Son of God. We read, that he groaned and bled upon the cross, till he could say, It is finished, but no longer. It becomes us to refer to infinite wisdom, the reasons why his sufferings were prolonged for such a precise time; but I think we may take it for granted that they did not endure an hour or a minute longer than was strictly necessary. The expression seems to be elliptical, and I apprehend the true sense is, that Jerusalem should receive *blessings*, double, much greater than all the afflictions which sin had brought upon her; and in general to us, to every believing sinner, that the blessings of the Gospel are an unspeakably great compensation, and over-balance, for all afflictions of every kind with which we have been, or can be exercised. Afflictions are the fruit of sin, and because our sins have been many, our afflictions may be many. "But where sin has "abounded, grace has much more abounded*."

Before our Lord healed the paralytic man who was brought to him, he said, *Be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee*†. His outward malady rendered him an object of compassion to those who brought him; but he appears to have been sensible of an inward malady, which only Jesus could discern, or pity, or relieve. I doubt not but his conscience was burdened with guilt. An assurance, therefore, that his sins were forgiven, was sufficient to make him be of good cheer, whether his palsy were removed or not. To this purpose the Psalmist speaks absolutely and without exception. "Blessed is the man," however circumstanced, "whose "transgression is forgiven, whose iniquity is covered‡." Though he be poor, afflicted, diseased, neglected or despised, if the Lord imputeth not his iniquity to him, he

* Rom. v. 20. † Mark ii. 5. ‡ Psal. xxxii. 1.

is a blessed man. There is no situation in human life so deplorable, but a sense of the pardoning love of God can support and comfort the sufferer under it, compose his spirit, yea, make him exceedingly joyful in all his tribulations; for he feels the power of the blood of Jesus cleansing his conscience from guilt, and giving him access by faith to the throne of grace, with liberty to say, Abba, Father; he knows that all his trials are under the direction of wisdom and love, are all working together for his good, and that the heaviest of them are light, and the longest momentary, in comparison of that far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, which is reserved for him in a better world*. Even at present, in the midst of his sufferings, having communion with God, and a gracious submission to his will, he possesses a peace that passeth understanding, and which the world can neither give nor take away.

I shall close this preliminary discourse with a few observations, by way of improvement.

1. How justly may we adopt the prophet's words, "Who is a God like unto thee† !" Behold and admire his goodness! Infinitely happy and glorious in himself, he has provided for the comfort of those who were rebels against his government, and transgressors of his holy law. What was degenerate Israel, and what are we, that he should thus prevent us with his mercy, remember us in our low estate, and redeem us from misery, in such a way, and at such a price! Salvation is wholly of *grace*‡; not only undeserved, but undesired by us, till he is pleased to awaken us to a sense of our need of it. And then we find every thing prepared that our wants require, or our wishes can con-

* 2 Cor. iv. 16, 17. † Micah vii. 18. ‡ Ephes. ii. 5.

ceive; yea, that he has done exceedingly beyond what we could either ask or think. Salvation is wholly of the *Lord**, and bears those signatures of infinite wisdom, power, and goodness, which distinguish all his works from the puny imitations of men. It is every way worthy of himself, a great, a free, a full, a sure salvation. It is great, whether we consider the objects, miserable and hell-deserving sinners; the end, the restoration of such alienated creatures to his image and favour, to immortal life and happiness; or the means, the incarnation, humiliation, sufferings, and death of his beloved Son. It is free, without exception of persons or cases, without any conditions or qualifications, but such as he himself performs in them, and bestows upon them. It is full, including every desirable blessing; pardon, peace, adoption, protection, and guidance through this world, and in the world to come eternal life and happiness, in the unclouded, uninterrupted enjoyment of the favour and love of God, with the perfect and perpetual exclusion of every evil.

2. When the Lord God, who knows the human heart, would speak comfort to it, he proposes one object, and only one, as the necessary and all-sufficient source of consolation. This is MESSIAH. Jesus in his person and offices, known and received by faith, affords a balm for every wound, a cordial for every care. If we admit that they who live in the spirit of the world, can make a poor shift to amuse themselves, and be tolerably satisfied in a state of prosperity, while every thing goes on according to their wish; while we make this concession, (which, however, is more than we need allow them, for we know that no state of life is

* Psal. iii. 8.

free from anxiety, disappointment, weariness, and disgust,) yet we must consider them as objects of compassion. It is a proof of the weakness and disorder of their minds that they are capable of being satisfied with such trifles. Thus if a lunatic conceives his cell to be a palace, that his chains are ornaments of gold, if he calls a wreath of his straw a crown, puts it on his head, and affects the language of majesty—we do not suppose the poor creature to be happy, because he tells us that he is so; but we rather consider his complacence in his situation, as an effect and proof of his malady. We pity him, and if we were able, would gladly restore him to his senses, though we know a cure would immediately put an end to his pleasing delusions. But, I say, supposing or admitting the world could make its votaries happy in a state of prosperity, it will, it must leave them without resource in the day of trouble. And they are to be pitied indeed, who, when their gourds are withered, when the desire of their eyes is taken from them with a stroke, or the evil which they most feared touches them, or when death looks them closely in the face, have no acquaintance with God, no access to the throne of grace, but, being without Christ, are without a solid hope of good hereafter, though they are forced to feel the vanity and inconstancy of every thing here. But they who know MESSIAH, who believe in him, and partake of his spirit, cannot be comfortless. They recollect what *he* suffered for them, they know that every circumstance and event of life is under his direction, and designed to work for their good; that though they sow in tears, they shall soon reap in joy; and therefore they possess their souls in patience, and are cheerful, yea, comfortable, under those trying dispensations of Providence, which, when they affect the

lovers of pleasure, too often either excite in them a spirit of presumptuous murmuring against the will of God, or sink them into despondency, and all the melancholy train of evils, attendant on those who languish and pine away under that depression of spirits, emphatically styled a broken heart.

3. To be capable of the comfort my text proposes, the mind must be in a suitable disposition. A free pardon is a comfort to a malefactor, but it implies guilt; and therefore they who have no apprehension that they have broken the laws, would be rather offended, than comforted, by an offer of pardon. This is one principal cause of that neglect, yea, contempt, which the Gospel of the grace of God meets with from the world. If we could suppose that a company of people who were all trembling under an apprehension of his displeasure, constrained to confess the justice of the sentence, but not as yet informed of any way to escape, were to hear this message for the first time, and to be fully assured of its truth and authority, they would receive it as life from the dead. But it is to be feared, that for want of knowing themselves, and their real state in the sight of him with whom they have to do, many persons, who have received pleasure from the music of the *Messiah*, have neither found, nor expected, nor desired to find, any comfort from the words.

SERMON II.

THE HARBINGER.

ISAIAH xl. 3—5.

The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.

THE general style of the prophecies is poetical. The inimitable simplicity which characterizes every part of divine Revelation, is diversified according to the nature of the subject; and the magnificence and variety of imagery which constitute the life and spirit of poetry, evidently distinguish the style of the Psalms, of Isaiah, and the other poetical books, from that of the historical, even in the common versions. The various rules and properties of Hebrew poetry are not, at this distance of time, certainly known. But the present bishop of London*, in his elegant and instructive lectures on the subject, and in the discourse prefixed to his translation of Isaiah, has fully demonstrated one property. It usually consists either of parallel or contrasted sentences. The parallel expressions, (excepting in the book of Proverbs,) are most prevalent. In these, the same thought, for substance, expressed in the first member, is repeated with some difference of phrase, in the following; which, if it enlarges or confirms the import of

* Dr. Lowth.

what went before, seldom varies the idea. Almost any passage I first cast my eye upon, will sufficiently explain my meaning. For instance, in the fifty-ninth chapter of Isaiah:

Ver 1. Behold the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save,
Neither is his ear heavy, that it cannot hear.
Ver. 9. Therefore is judgment far from us,
Neither doth justice overtake us:
We wait for light, but behold obscurity;
For brightness, but we walk in darkness.

So in chap. lv.

Ver. 2. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread;
And your labour for that which satisfieth not?
Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good,
And let your soul delight itself in fatness.

So likewise in Psalm ii.

Ver. 4. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh;
The Lord shall have them in derision.
Ver. 5. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath;
And vex them in his sore displeasure.

These specimens may suffice for my present purpose. The knowledge of this peculiarity of the poetical idiom, may often save us the trouble of inquiring minutely into the meaning of every single word, when one plain and comprehensive sense arises from a view of the whole passage taken together. This observation applies to the first of the verses in my text. Though it be true that John the Baptist lived for a season retired and unnoticed in a wilderness, and began to preach in the wilderness of Judea, the expression, *The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness,* does not merely foretell that

circumstance. The verse consists of two parallels. The prophet, rapt into future times, hears a voice proclaiming the approach of MESSIAH, and this is the majestic language:

> In the wilderness prepare ye the way of the Lord;
> Make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

The wilderness and the desert are the same here, as likewise in chap. xxxv. where the happy, the sudden, the unexpected effects of his appearance are described:

> The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad,
> And the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose.

Now to see, by the eye of faith, the glory of the Redeemer in his appearance; to see power divine preparing the way before him; to enter into the gracious and wonderful design of his salvation; to acknowledge, admire, and adore him as the Lord, and humbly to claim him as *our* God, must afford a pleasure very different from that which the most excellent music, however well adapted to the words, can possibly give. The latter may be relished by a worldly mind; the former is appropriate, and can only be enjoyed by those who are taught of God.

When the eastern monarchs travelled, harbingers went before to give notice that the king was upon the road, and likewise proper persons to prepare his way, and to remove obstacles. Some of them, (if we may depend upon history,) in the affectation of displaying their pomp and power, effected extraordinary things upon such occasions. For man, though vain, would appear *wise;* though a sinful worm, he would fain be accounted *great.* We read of their having actually filled

up valleys, and levelled hills, to make a commodious road, for themselves or their armies, through places otherwise impassable. The prophet thus illustrates great things by small, and accommodates the language and usages of men to divine truth. MESSIAH is about to visit a wilderness world, and those parts of it which he blesses with his presence, shall become the garden of the Lord. Till then it is all desolate, rocky, and wild. But his way shall be prepared. Mountainous difficulties shall sink down before him into plains. In defiance of all obstacles, his glory shall be revealed in the wilderness, and all flesh shall see it, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.

The leading ideas respecting MESSIAH's appearance, suggested by this sublime representation, are,

I. The state of the world at his coming—*A wilderness.*

II. The preparation of his way. "Every valley "shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall "be made low."

III. The manner and effects of his manifestation. "And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all "flesh shall see it."

I. The word *wilderness*, I suppose, generally excites the idea of an intricate, solitary, uncultivated, dangerous place. Such is the description Jeremiah gives of that wilderness through which the Lord led Israel, when he had delivered them from Egypt. "A land of deserts "and of pits, a land of drought and of the shadow of "death, a land that no man passeth through, and where "no man dwelt*." The world in which we sojourn for a season, does not appear to us in this unpleasing view

* Jer. ii. 6.

at first. The spirit, and the things of it, are congenial to our depraved inclinations; and especially in early life, our inexperienced hearts form high expectations from it; and we rather hope to find it a paradise than a wilderness. But when the convincing power of the Holy Spirit opens the eyes of the understanding, we awake as from a dream; the enchantment by which we were deluded is broken, and we then begin to judge rightly of the world; that it is a wearisome wilderness indeed, and that our only important concern with it is to get happily out of it. In a spiritual view, a wilderness is a significant emblem of the state of mankind, both Jews and Heathens, at that period which the apostle calls the fulness of time, when God sent forth his Son*.

Israel, once the beloved people of God, was at that time so extremely degenerated, that, a few individuals excepted, the vineyard of the Lord, so highly cultivated, so signally protected, yielded only wild grapes †. Though they were not addicted to imitate the idolatry of the Heathens, as their forefathers had been, they were no less alienated from the true God; and their wickedness was the more aggravated, for being practised under a professed attachment to the forms of his law. They drew nigh to God with their lips, but their hearts were far from him ‡. Their very worship profaned the temple in which they gloried, and the holy house of prayer, through their abominations, was become a den of thieves. They owned the divine authority of the Scriptures, and read them with seeming attention, but rendered them of none effect, through the greater attention they paid to the corrupt traditions of their elders. They boasted

* Gal. iv. 4. † Isa. v. 4. ‡ Mark vii. 6.

in their relation to Abraham as their father, but proved themselves to be indeed the children of those who had persecuted and murdered the prophets*. The Scribes and Pharisees, who sat in the chair of Moses, and were the public teachers of the people, under an exterior garb of sanctity, of prayer and fasting, were guilty of oppression, fraud, and uncleanness; and while they trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others, their real character was a combination of pride and hypocrisy. Therefore he who knew their hearts, and saw through all their disguises, compared them to painted sepulchres, fair to outward appearance, but within full of filth and impurity†. From the spirit of these blind guides, we may judge of the spirit of the blind people who held them in admiration, and were willingly directed and led by them. Thus was the faithful city become a harlot; it was once full of judgment; righteousness lodged in it, but now murderers‡. Such a wilderness was Judea when MESSIAH condescended to visit it.

Among the Heathens, ignorance, idolatry, sensuality, and cruelty, universally prevailed. Their pretended wise men had, indeed, talked of wisdom and morality from age to age; but their speculations were no more than swelling words of vanity, cold, trifling, uncertain, and without any valuable influence, either upon themselves or upon others. They had philosophers, poets, orators, musicians, and artists, eminent in their way; but the nations reputed the most civilized, were overwhelmed with abominable wickedness equally with the rest. The shocking effect of their idolatry upon their moral principles and conduct, notwithstanding their at-

* Matth. xxiii. 30, 31. † Matth. xxiii. 27. ‡ Isa. i. 21.

tainments in arts and science, is described by the apostle in the close of the first chapter of his epistle to the Romans. With great propriety, therefore, the state of the world, both Jew and Gentile, considered in a moral view, is compared by the prophet to a wilderness—a barren and dreary waste. The pursuits and practices of the world were diametrically opposite to the spirit and design of that kingdom which MESSIAH was about to set up; and therefore, as the event proved, directly disposed to withstand his progress. But,

II. Before his appearance a way was prepared for him in the wilderness.

The providence of God, by a gradual train of dispensations, disposed the political state of mankind in a subserviency to this great event. All the commotions and revolutions which take place in the kingdoms of the earth are so many detached parts of a complicated but wisely determined plan, of which the establishment of MESSIAH's kingdom is the final cause. The kings and politicians of the world are not aware of this. God is not in their thoughts. But while they pursue their own ends, and make havock of the peace of mankind, to gratify their own interests and ambition, and look no higher, they are ignorantly, and without intention, acting as instruments of the will of God. The wrath of man is over-ruled to his praise and his purpose*, and succeeds so far as it is instrumental to the accomplishment of his designs, and no further. While they move in this line, their schemes, however injudiciously laid, and whatever disproportion there may seem between the means they are possessed of, and the vast objects they aim at, prosper beyond their own expectations, but the remainder of their wrath he

* Psal. lxxvi. 10.

will restrain. Their best projected and best supported enterprizes issue in shame and disappointment, if they are not necessary parts of that chain of causes and events which the Lord of all has appointed. Thus Sennacherib, when sent by the God whom he knew not, to execute his displeasure against the kingdom of Judah, had, for a time, a rapid and uninterrupted series of conquests*; but his attempt upon Jerusalem was beyond the limits of his commission, and therefore failed. Among the principal instruments who were appointed to prepare a way in the wilderness for MESSIAH, and to facilitate the future spread of his kingdom, we may take notice of Alexander; and this designation secured his success, though the extravagancies, excesses, and rashness, which marked his character, were sufficient to have rendered his undertakings abortive, had he not been in the hand of the Lord of hosts, as an ax or a saw in the hand of the workman. By his conquests the knowledge of the Greek language was diffused among many nations; and the Hebrew Scriptures being soon afterwards translated into that language, an expectation of some great deliverer was raised far and wide, before MESSIAH appeared. When this service was fulfilled, the haughty presumptuous worm who had been employed in it, was no longer necessary, and therefore was soon laid aside; and all his proud designs, for the establishment of his own family and dominion, perished with him. His empire was divided towards the four winds of heaven, and this division likewise contributed to bring forward the purpose of God†. For each of the four kingdoms, established by his successors, being thus separated, became a more easy prey to the Roman power. This power, which had

* Isa. xxxvii. 26—29. † Dan. viii. 8.

been gradually increasing and extending in the course of several hundred years, was at the height about the time of our Lord's birth. The greatest part of the habitable earth which was at that time distinctly known, was united under one empire, composed of various kingdoms and governments, which, though once independent and considerable, were then no more than Roman provinces; and as all the provinces had an immediate connexion with Rome, a way was thus prepared, and an intercourse opened, on every side, for the promulgation of the Gospel.

Among the Jews, the professing people of God, a way was prepared for MESSIAH by the ministry of his harbinger, John the Baptist, who came in the spirit and power of Elijah, (as had been foretold of him by the prophets, particularly by the last of the prophets, Malachi,) preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, and proclaiming that the Saviour and his kingdom were at hand. He who sent him accompanied his mission with a divine power. A multitude of persons, of various descriptions, were impressed by his message, insomuch that John himself seems to have been astonished at the numbers and characters of those who came to his baptism.

When the ministry of John had thus previously disposed the minds of many for the reception of MESSIAH, and engaged the attention of the people at large, MESSIAH himself entered upon his public office, on the same scene and among the same people. As he increased, John willingly decreased. So the morning star ceases to be seen as the sun advances above the horizon. This distinguished servant of God having finished his work, was removed to a better world. Not in the triumphant manner in which Elijah was translated; but as he came to

announce a new dispensation, under which believers were to expect opposition and ill treatment, to walk by faith, and frequently to be called to seal their testimony with their blood, he was permitted to fall a sacrifice to the revenge of a wanton woman; and though we are assured that none of the race of Adam was greater in the estimation of God than he, his death was asked and procured as the reward of an idle dance*.

III. The latter part of my text describes the manner and immediate effects of MESSIAH's appearance during his personal ministry, with an intimation of its future and more extensive consequences.

"The valleys shall be exalted." A valley is an emblem of a low condition. Such was the condition of most of our Lord's followers; but his notice and favour exalted them highly. He came to preach the Gospel to the poor, to fill the hungry with good things, to save the chief of sinners, to open a door of hope and salvation to persons of the vilest and most despicable characters in human estimation. Such, for instance, was the woman mentioned by the evangelist Luke†. The Pharisee thought our Lord dishonoured himself by permitting such a one to touch him, nor had she a word to say in her own behalf. But the compassionate Saviour highly exalted her, when he vouchsafed to plead her cause, to express his gracious acceptance of her tears and love, and to assure her that her sins, though many, were all forgiven. Very low likewise was the state of the malefactor on the cross; he had committed great crimes, was suffering grievous torments, and in the very jaws of death ‡. But grace visited his heart, he was plucked as a brand out of

* Matth. xi. 11.; xiv. 8—11.

† Luke vii. 37, 38. ‡ Luke xxiii. 42.

the fire, and exalted to paradise and glory. The world accounts the proud happy, and honours the covetous if they be prosperous. But true honour cometh from God. They who are partakers of the faith and hope of the Gospel, and have interest in the precious promises, are indeed the rich, the happy, the excellent of the earth, however they may be unnoticed or despised by their fellow-creatures. The honour of places likewise is to be considered in this light. Bethlehem, though but of little note among the thousands of Judah, was rendered more illustrious by the birth of MESSIAH, than Babylon or Rome. The Galileans were held in contempt by the inhabitants of Jerusalem, as a mean and provincial people; but the places in Galilee, which our Lord frequently visited, or where he sometimes resided, are spoken of as exalted unto heaven, by the honour and privilege of his presence, though some of them were no more than fishing towns. And so at this day, if we have spiritual discernment, we shall judge, that a little village, where the Gospel is known, prized, and adorned by a suitable conversation, has a dignity and importance far preferable to all the parade of a wealthy metropolis, if destitute of the like privileges.

On the contrary, "Every mountain and hill shall be "brought low." MESSIAH came to pour contempt on all human glory. He detected the wickedness, and confounded the pride of the Scribes, and Pharisees, and rulers; and made it appear, that what is highly esteemed among men, το ὑψηλον, the summit of their boasted excellency, is worthless, yea, abomination in the sight of God*. And by living himself in a state of poverty, and associating chiefly with poor people, he placed the

* Luke xvi. 15.

vanity of the distinctions and affluence which mankind generally admire and envy, in the most striking and humiliating light. Such likewise was and will be the effect of his Gospel. When faithfully preached, it is found mighty, through God, to the pulling down strong holds, high thoughts, and every species of self-exaltation. When the convincing word touches the heart, it has an effect like the hand-writing which Belshazzar saw upon the wall*. In that day the lofty looks of man are humbled, and his haughtiness bowed down†; he dares no longer plead the goodness of his heart, or trust to the work of his hands. A sense of forgiveness and acceptance through the Beloved, received by faith in his atonement, lays him still lower: he now renounces as loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus the Lord, all that he once esteemed his gain, and is glad that he has nothing to trust or glory in but the cross‡. Further, every mountain that opposes the kingdom of MESSIAH, in due time must sink into a plain§, though the nations rage, and the rulers take counsel together, he who sitteth in the heavens will support and maintain his own work, and all their power and policy shall fall before it.

"The crooked shall be made straight, and the rough "places smooth." He came to rectify the perverse disposition of the hearts of men, to soften and subdue their obstinate spirits, and to form to himself a willing people in the day of his power. The Jewish teachers, by their traditions and will-worship, had given an apparent obliquity to the straight and perfect rule of the law of God, and deformed the beauties of holiness, binding heavy burdens, and grievous to be borne, upon the conscience;

* Dan. v. 6. † Isa. ii. 11. ‡ Phil. iii. 7, 8. § Zech. iv. 7.

but he vindicated the law from their corrupt glosses, and made the path of obedience plain, practicable, and pleasant.

"Thus the glory of the Lord was revealed." Not to every eye; many prejudiced by his outward appearance, and by the low mistaken views the Jews indulged of the office and kingdom of MESSIAH, whom they expected, could see no form or excellence in him, that they should desire him; but his disciples could say, "We beheld his "glory*." He spake with authority. His word was with power. He controlled the elements, he raised the dead. He knew, and revealed, and judged the thoughts of men's hearts. He forgave sin, and thus exercised the rights, and displayed the perfections of divine sovereignty in his own person. But the prophecy looks forward to future times. After his ascension he filled his apostles and disciples with light and power, and sent them forth in all directions to proclaim his love and grace to a sinful world. Then the glory of the Lord was revealed, and spread from one kingdom to another people. We still wait for the full accomplishment of this promise, and expect a time when the whole earth shall be filled with his glory; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. It is to the power of his word that we owe the continuance of day and night, and the regular return of the seasons of the year. But these appointments are only for a limited term; the hour is coming, when the frame of nature shall be dissolved. Heaven and earth shall pass away; but not a jot or tittle of what he hath declared concerning his kingdom of grace shall fail, till the whole be fulfilled.

Those of you who have heard the *Messiah*, will do

* John i. 14.

well to recollect, whether you were affected by such thoughts as these while this passage was performed; or whether you were only captivated by the music, and paid no more regard to the words than if they had no meaning. They are, however, the great truths of God. May they engage your serious attention, now they are thus set before you!

SERMON III.

THE SHAKING OF THE HEAVENS AND THE EARTH.

HAGGAI ii. 6, 7.

Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land: And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come; and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts.

GOD shook the earth when he proclaimed his law to Israel from Sinai. The description, though very simple, presents to our thoughts a scene unspeakably majestic, grand, and awful. The mountain was in flames at the top, and trembled to its basis*. Dark clouds, thunderings, and lightnings, filled the air. The hearts of the people, of the whole people, trembled likewise; and even Moses himself said, *I exceedingly fear and quake.* Then, as the apostle, referring to this passage, observes, The voice of the Lord shook the earth†. But the prophet here speaks of another, a greater, a more import-

* Exod. xix. 16—19. † Heb. xii. 26.

ant, and extensive concussion. Yet, once a little while, and I will shake not the earth only, but the heavens.

If we really believe that the Scriptures are true, that the prophecies were delivered by holy men, who spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit, and that they shall all be certainly fulfilled; how studious should we be to attain a right understanding of passages and events, in which we are so nearly interested, that our hearts may be duly affected by them? But, alas! experience and observation strongly confirm the remark of the poet,

Men are but children of a larger growth.

If you put a telescope into the hands of a child, he will probably admire the outside, especially if it be finely ornamented. But the use of it, in giving a more distinct view of distant objects, is what the child has no conception of. The music of the *Messiah* is but an ornament of the words, which have a very weighty sense. This sense no music can explain, and when rightly understood, will have such an effect as no music can produce. That the music of the *Messiah* has a great effect in its own kind, I can easily believe. The ancients, to describe the power of the music of Orpheus, pretend, that when he played upon his harp, the wild beasts thronged around him to listen, and seemed to forget their natural fierceness. Such expressions are figurative, and designed to intimate, that by his address and instructions, he civilized men of fierce and savage dispositions. But if we were to allow the account to be true in the literal sense, I should still suppose, that the wild beasts were affected by his music only while they heard it, and that it did not actually change their

natures, and render lions and tigers gentle as lambs, from that time forward. Thus I can allow, that they who heard the *Messiah* might be greatly impressed during the performance; but when it was ended, I suppose they would retain the very same dispositions they had before it began. And many, I fear, were no more affected by this sublime declaration of the Lord's design to shake the heavens and the earth, than they would have been, if the same music had been set to the words of a common ballad.

The Jews, when they returned from captivity, and undertook to rebuild the temple of the Lord, met with many discouragements. They were disturbed by the opposition and arts of their enemies, who at one time so far prevailed, as to compel them, for a season, to intermit the work. And when the foundation of the temple was laid, the joy of those who hoped soon to see the solemn worship of God restored, was damped by the grief of others, who remembered the magnificence of the first temple, and wept to think how far the second temple would come short of it*. In these circumstances, the prophets Haggai and Zechariah were sent to animate the people by a promise, that inferior as the second temple might appear, compared with that which Solomon built, the glory of the latter house should be greater than the glory of the former†. Had this depended upon a profusion of silver and gold, the Lord could have provided it; for "The silver is mine, "and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts." But the glory spoken of was of a different kind. The presence of MESSIAH in the second temple, would render it far more honourable and glorious, though less pompous,

* Hag. ii. 3; Ezra iii. 12. † Hag. ii. 9.

than the temple of Solomon; and would be attended with greater consequences, than even the manifestation of the God of Israel on mount Sinai. Then he only shook the earth; but under the second temple, he would shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land, to introduce the kingdom of MESSIAH.

We may consider from the words,

I. A character of MESSIAH: "The Desire of all "nations."

II. The effects of his appearance: "Shaking the "heavens and the earth."

III. "His filling the house with glory." This close of the 7th verse is not in the passage set to music, but as it is an eminent part of the prophecy, I shall not exclude it.

I. MESSIAH is styled, "The Desire of all nations." The propriety of this title may be illustrated by two considerations.

1. Before he came into the world to save sinners, an expectation prevailed in many nations that a great deliverer and friend of mankind was at hand. This was, perhaps, partly the effect of some ancient traditions founded on the promises of God respecting the seed of the woman, the traces of which, though much corrupted by the addition of fables, were not worn out—but might be chiefly owing to several dispersions of the people of Israel, and imperfect notices derived from the Scriptures in their hands. The sense of many prophecies concerning MESSIAH, though misapplied, is remarkably expressed in a short poem of Virgil, written a few years before our Saviour's birth. This eclogue, of which we have a beautiful imitation in our own language by Mr. Pope, affords a sufficient proof that the Heathens had an idea of some illustrious personage, who would shortly appear and restore peace, prosper-

, and all the blessings of their imaginary golden age mankind. The miseries and evils with which the rld was filled, made the interposition of such a de- erer highly desirable. There were even a few among ɜ Heathens, such as Socrates and his immediate dis- ɔles, who seem to have felt the necessity of a divine ıcher; and to be sensible that man, in a state of na- re, was too depraved, and too ignorant, to be either ɔle or disposed to worship God acceptably without one. here is reason to believe, that the Revelation which ɜ enjoy, though despised by too many who affect to be lled philosophers in modern times, would have been ghly prized by the wisest and best of the philosophers antiquity. Socrates thought men were not capable knowing and expressing their own wants, nor of ask- g what was good for themselves, unless it should ease God to send them an instructor from heaven, to ach them how to pray. And therefore,

2. The need that all nations had of such a Saviour, sufficient to establish his right to this title, admitting ey had no knowledge or expectation of him. If we uld suppose a nation involved for ages in the dark- ss of night, though they had no previous notion of ght, yet light might be said *to be* their desire, because ıe light, whenever they should enjoy it, would put an ıd to their calamity, would answer their wants, and in ıat sense accomplish their wishes; for if they could ɔt directly wish for light, they would naturally wish ır relief. The Heathens were miserably bewildered. hey had a thirst for happiness, which could not be ıtisfied by any, or all the expedients and pursuits ithin their reach. They had fears and forebodings of ɔnscience, for which they knew no remedy. They ere so sensible, both of their guilt and their weakness,

that being ignorant of the character of the true God, and of that forgiveness which is with him, in times of extremity they frequently offered the most expensive sacrifices to the objects of their idolatrous superstition, even the blood and lives of their children*. When MESSIAH appeared, as he was the glory of Israel, so he was a light to the Gentiles, as we shall have opportunity of observing more at large hereafter. He, therefore, who came purposely to bless the nations, by turning them from darkness to light, and from the worship of dumb idols to serve the living and true God, may justly be called their *desire*, though, in the time of their ignorance, they could form no suitable conception of him.

II. "I will shake the heavens and the earth." This part of the prophecy has been, in a measure, literally fulfilled. At his birth a new star appeared. At his death the sun withdrew his shining, the earth quaked, the rocks rent, and the dead arose. During his life he often suspended and over-ruled the stated laws of nature, and exercised supreme power over the visible and invisible worlds. He shook the kingdom of darkness, spoiled principalities and powers, triumphing over them by his cross. He shook the kingdoms of the earth, the idols trembled and disappeared before his Gospel, till at length the Roman empire renounced Heathenism, and embraced the Christian name.

But the language of prophecy is highly figurative. Mountains and trees, land and water, sun and moon, heaven and earth, often signify nations, people, and governments. And particularly, heaven and earth are used to denote the religious and political establishmen

* Micah vi. 6, 7.

of Israel; or, as we say, their constitution in church and state. This, without doubt, is the primary sense here. The appearance of MESSIAH shall be connected with the total dissolution of the Jewish economy. The whole of their Levitical institution was fulfilled, superseded, and abrogated by MESSIAH, which was solemnly signified, by the rending of the vail of the temple from the top to the bottom at his death. And, a few years afterwards, the temple itself was destroyed. By which event, the worship of God according to the law, of which the temple-service was an essential part, was rendered utterly impracticable. Their civil state likewise was dissolved, they were extirpated from the promised land, and dispersed far and wide among the nations of the earth. Though in one sense they are preserved by the wonderful providence of God, as a distinct people, unaffected by the changes and customs around them: in another sense they are not a people, having neither settlement nor government, but living as strangers and foreigners in every country where their lot has been cast*. Nothing like this can be found in the history of mankind. It is an obvious, striking, and perpetual proof of the truth of the Scriptures. What was foretold concerning them by Moses and the succeeding prophets, is accomplished to a demonstration before our eyes. How unlikely was it once that it should be thus! yet thus it must be, because the mouth of the Lord has spoken it. And all that he has spoken is equally sure. He will yet again shake the heavens and the earth, dissolve the frame of nature, and execute his threatened judgments upon all those who do not receive and obey his Gospel.

* Hosea iii. 4.

III. "He shall fill this house with glory." He d when he condescended to visit it in person. The and the lame came thither to him, and he healed th Children felt his power, and sung Hosanna to the of David, a title appropriate to MESSIAH; and the Pharisees rebuked them, he said, "If these sh "hold their peace, the stones would cry out†." A Lord in his own house, he purged the temple, and c out those who profaned it; and not one of his en durst offer the least resistance to his will. And he left it the last time, with sovereign authority h nounced that awful sentence, which was soon a wards executed by the Romans, both upon the te and the nation‡. His glory filled the temple wh was an infant, so that Simeon and Anna then ack ledged his character, and spake of him to those were waiting for the consolation of Israel§. Espe his glory was manifested when he proclaimed hi the fountain of life, and invited every thirsty weary ner to come to him, to drink and live for ever‖.

The temple of Jerusalem has been long since troyed. But he has still a house, "A house not made "hands." This is his church, comprising all the men of his mystical body. He dwells in each of them in dually; he dwells in and among them collectively. W two or three are met in his name, where his ordinanc administered and prized, where his Gospel is faith preached and cordially received, there he is prese the midst of them. There his glory is seen, his heard, his power felt, his goodness tasted, and the sa of his name is diffused as a precious ointment, whic

* Matth. xxi. 15, 16. † Luke xix. 40.
‡ Matth. xxiii. 37. § Luke ii. 25—38. ‖ John vii.

freshes the hearts of his people, renews their strength, and comforts them under all their sorrows and cares. The glory and magnificence of the temple-worship, even in the days of Solomon, was faint, compared with the glory displayed to the hearts of believers, who worship him in spirit and truth, under the New Testament dispensation. But it can only be perceived by an enlightened and spiritual mind. To outward appearance all may be low and humiliating. The malice of their enemies has often constrained his people to assemble in woods and on mountains, in places under ground; or, in the dead of the night, to secrete themselves from informers. But vaulted roofs, and costly garments, the solemn parade of processions, music, and choristers, and the presence of nobles and dignitaries, are not necessary to constitute the glory of Gospel-worship. It is enough that he, in whose name they meet, condescends to visit them with the power and influence of his Spirit, to animate and hear their prayers, to feed them with the good word of his grace, and to fill them with joy and peace in believing. If they have these blessings they desire no more, they are compensated for all their difficulties and hardships; and however unnoticed and despised by the world, they can say, "This is none other than the house "of God, this is the gate of heaven*." For they approach by faith to the city of the living God, the Jerusalem which is above, to the worship which is carried on day without night, by the innumerable company of angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect†.

But every member of this mystical temple, being by nature afar off from God, experiences a previous change which may be not unfitly described by the terms of my

* Gen. xxviii. 17. † Heb. xii. 22.

text. Before the Lord takes possession of his people, and in order to it, "He shakes the heavens and the earth." Their former views of God and of themselves, are altered by a light which penetrates the soul. All that they have been building in religion, till then, is shaken and overturned. Their vain hopes are shaken to the foundation. This concussion makes way for the perception of his glory as a Saviour. In this day of his power they are made willing to throw open the gates of their hearts, that the King of glory may enter.

But as I do not stand here to amuse you with a declamation on a subject in which you are not immediately interested, and as my office as a preacher both warrants and requires me to address myself not only to your understandings but likewise to your consciences, I must be allowed, before I conclude, to propose this question to your consideration, Is MESSIAH, the desire of all nations, the object of your chief desire? How much depends upon the answer! Do you wish to know your present state in the sight of God? If you are faithful to yourselves, you may be satisfied, provided you will abide by the decision of the Scripture. God is well pleased *in* his Son; if you are well pleased *with* him, if he is precious to you, and the desire of your soul is supremely directed to him, then you assuredly possess the beginning, the fore-taste, and the earnest of eternal life. If you so enter into the descriptions given in the Bible, of his person, love, office, and glory, as to place your whole dependence upon him, to devote yourselves simply to him, and to place your happiness in his favour, then you are happy indeed! Happy, even at present, though not exempted from a share in the afflictions incident to this mortal state. For your sins are pardoned, your persons are accepted in the Beloved; to you be-

long the promises of guidance, protection, and supply through life, victory over death, and then a crown of glory which fadeth not away. To say all in a few words, God is your Father, and heaven is your home.

But, on the other hand, if you trust in yourself that you are righteous and good, at least comparatively so; if your attachment to the business or the pleasure of the world engrosses your thoughts and application, so that you have no leisure to attend to the record which God has given of his Son, or no relish for the subject, you have been hitherto guilty of treating the most glorious display of the wisdom and goodness of God with contempt. Many persons thus employed and thus disposed, bear respectable characters in civil life, from which I do not wish to detract. But however amiable you may be in the judgment of your fellow-creatures, you are a sinner in the sight of God, and will be treated by him as an enemy to his government and glory, if you finally persist in a rejection of his Gospel. The great point which will determine your state for eternity, will be this, What think you of Christ? For it is written, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, "let him be Anathema Maranatha*." He must and will fall under the curse and condemnation of the law, and be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and the glory of his power. To-day, therefore, while it is called to-day, (for to-morrow is not ours,) may you hear his voice, and flee for refuge to the hope set before you.

* 1 Cor. xvi. 22.

SERMON IV.

THE LORD COMING TO HIS TEMPLE.

MALACHI iii. 1—3.

The Lord whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple; even the Messenger of the covenant whom ye delight in; behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts. But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap—And he shall purify the sons of Levi—that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.

"WHEREUNTO shall we liken the people of this "generation, and to what are they like*?" I represent to myself a number of persons of various characters, involved in one common charge of high treason. They are already in a state of confinement, but not yet brought to their trial. The facts, however, are so plain, and the evidence against them so strong and pointed, that there is not the least doubt of their guilt being fully proved, and that nothing but a pardon can preserve them from punishment. In this situation, it should seem their wisdom, to avail themselves of every expedient in their power for obtaining mercy. But they are entirely regardless of their danger, and wholly taken up with contriving methods of amusing themselves, that they may pass away the term of their imprisonment with as much cheerfulness as possible. Among other resources, they call in the assistance of music. And

* Luke vii. 31.

amidst a great variety of subjects in this way, they are particularly pleased with one. They choose to make the solemnities of their impending trial, the character of their judge, the methods of his procedure, and the awful sentence to which they are exposed, the groundwork of a musical entertainment. And, as if they were quite unconcerned in the event, their attention is chiefly fixed upon the skill of the composer, in adapting the style of his music, to the very solemn language and subject with which they are trifling. The king, however, out of his great clemency and compassion towards those who have no pity for themselves, prevents them with his goodness. Undesired by them, he sends them a gracious message. He assures them that he is unwilling they should suffer: he requires, yea, he entreats them to submit. He points out a way in which their confession and submission shall be certainly accepted; and in this way, which he condescends to prescribe, he offers them a free and a full pardon. But instead of taking a single step towards a compliance with his goodness, they set his message likewise to music; and this, together with a description of their present state, and of the fearful doom awaiting them if they continue obstinate, is sung for their diversion, accompanied with the sound of cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of instruments*. Surely, if such a case as I have supposed could be found in real life, though I might admire the musical taste of these people, I should commiserate their insensibility!

But is not this case more than a supposition? Is it not in the most serious sense actually realized amongst ourselves? I should insult your understandings, if I

* Dan. iii. 5.

know my sup-
ar noughts to the
spirit and temper of
formers, and of the
concludes all man-
all with treason and
sign Lawgiver and Be-
sery to which, as sinners,
od is long-suffering, and
stroke of death, which would
is awful tribunal, is still sus-
ame he affords us his Gospel,
ere is forgiveness with him.
viour, and that, of his great love
en his only Son to be an atone-
, in favour of all who shall sue for
The character of this Saviour, his
s dreadful sufferings, the agonies
semane, and upon the cross, are
And as his past humiliation, so
, and his invitation to come to him for
eal life, are largely declared. These
points expressed in the passages of
Mr Handel, who set them to music, has
ecrated and praised, many years after his
place professedly devoted to the praise and
God; yea, (if I am not misinformed,) the
ship of God, in that place, was supended
considerable time, that it might be duly prepared
commemoration of Mr. Handel. But, alas!
are disposed to praise and commemorate
himself! The same great truths, divested

[redacted]

* Rom. iii. 9.

of the music, when delivered from the pulpit, are heard by many admirers of the Oratorio with indifference, too often with contempt.

Having thus, as I conceived myself bound in duty, plainly and publicly delivered my sentiments of the great impropriety of making the fundamental truths of Christianity the subject of a public amusement, I leave what I have said to your serious reflections, hoping it will not be forgotten; for I do not mean to trouble you often with a repetition of it. Let us now consider the passage before us. If you read it with attention, and consider the great ideas it suggests, and the emphatical language with which they are clothed, you will not, perhaps, think the manner of my introducing it wholly improper.

Malachi confirms and unites the prophecies of Isaiah and Haggai, which were the subject of our two last discourses. John is the messenger spoken of in the beginning of the first verse, sent to prepare the way of the Lord. Then "the Lord himself shall come sud-"denly to his temple," that is, immediately after the appearance of his forerunner, and with regard to the people in general, unexpectedly.

The question, "Who may abide the day of his com-"ing?" intimates the greatness and solemnity of the event. If we take his coming in an extensive sense, to denote the whole of his sojourning upon earth, from his incarnation to his ascension, it is unspeakably the greatest of all events recorded in the annals of mankind; and though he lived in the form of a servant, and died the death of a malefactor, the vast consequences which depend upon his appearance under these humiliating circumstances, rendered it a manner of coming every way worthy of himself. It afforded a more

ful discovery of the majesty, glory, and holiness of God, than was displayed upon mount Sinai, and proved a closer and more searching appeal to the hearts and consciences of men. To enter more into the spirit and meaning of the question here proposed, we shall briefly take notice of the following points which the words offer to our serious meditation. May the Holy Spirit, whose office it is to glorify the Saviour, enlighten our hearts to understand them, with application to ourselves!

I. The *names* which are here ascribed to MESSIAH.

II. The suddenness of his coming.

III. The searching power of it in general, expressed by "a refiner's fire," and by "fullers' soap."

IV. Its purifying power on "the sons of Levi," the priesthood in particular.

I. The names ascribed to MESSIAH.

"The Lord." It is a general rule with our translators to express LORD in capital letters, where it answers to Jehovah in the Hebrew, and there only. But this place is an exception. The word here is not Jehovah, but Adonai. It is however a name of God, though not incommunicable like the other, being frequently applied to kings and superiors. It properly implies authority and rule; as we say, *A Lord and Master.* In this connexion it is undoubtedly a divine name. The Lord is said to come to his temple, to his own temple. It was a house consecrated to the God of Israel. The first temple he honoured with tokens of his presence; the second, he visited in person; on which account it exceeded the first in glory. MESSIAH, therefore, who appeared in our nature, and was known amongst men, as a man, and who is now worshipped both in heaven and upon earth, is the God of

Israel. "He came to his own." This doctrine of God manifest in the flesh is the pillar and ground of truth: the only foundation on which a sinner, who knows the just desert of his sin, can build a solid hope of salvation is, that Jesus Christ "is the true God and "eternal life*." Unless this be admitted, the whole tenour, both of the Old and New Testament, is unintelligible. To say that this doctrine approves itself to human reason in its present fallen depraved state, would be to contradict the apostle, who asserts, that "no man "can say that Jesus Christ is Lord, but by the Holy "Ghost†." But it is highly reasonable, to those who see that they must perish, without such an atonement as shall declare the righteousness of God, no less than his mercy, in the forgiveness of sin; who feel the necessity of holiness, in order to happiness; and are acquainted with the nature and variety of the snares, temptations, and enemies to which they are exposed. Such persons cannot venture their eternal concerns upon the dignity, or care, or power, or patience of a mere creature, however exalted and excellent; they must be assured that their Saviour is Almighty, or they dare not trust in him; nor would they dare to honour the Son as they honour the Father, to love him with all their heart, and soul, and strength, to devote themselves absolutely to his service, and to expect their supreme happiness from his favour and approbation, if they did not know that he is over all, God blessed for ever.

With respect to the inferior character he sustains in our nature, and for our sakes, as the Father's servant, he is styled, "The messenger of the covenant." He is the Gift, Promise, Head, and Substance of the ever-

* 1 John v. 20. † 1 Cor. xii. 3.

lasting covenant. And he came himself to establish the covenant, and to declare and bestow the blessings it contained. "God, who had before spoken at divers "times and in sundry manners by his prophets, spoke "in the fulness of time by his Son *;" testifying to him by a voice from heaven, "This is my beloved Son, "hear him; in him I am well pleased †." To the same purpose our Lord spake of himself. He prefaced his gracious invitation to all, without exception, who are weary and heavy laden, to come to him for rest, with a declaration of his commission and authority, saying, "All things are delivered unto me of my Father, "and no one," (οὐδεὶς) "knoweth the Son but the Father, "neither knoweth any one the Father, save the Son, "and he to whom the Son will reveal him ‡." The law was given by Moses §; the moral law, to discover the extent and abounding of sin; the ceremonial law, to point out, by typical sacrifices and ablutions, the way in which forgiveness was to be sought and obtained. But *grace*, to relieve us from the condemnation of the one, and *truth* answerable to the types and shadows of the other, came by Jesus Christ.

It is further said, "The Lord whom ye seek, and the "Messenger in whom ye delight."—MESSIAH was the hope and desire of the true Israel of God, from the earliest times; and when he was born into the world, there was a prepared people waiting and longing for him, as their consolation. The people at large likewise professed to expect great things from the coming of MESSIAH. But their expectations were low and earthly. They supposed that he would deliver them from the Roman yoke, and give them victory and power over the Heathen

* Heb. i. 1. † Matth. iii. 17.
‡ Matth. xi. 27. § John i. 17.

nations. The more grievous bondage of sin under which they were enslaved, they were not sensible of, nor had they had a disposition suited to the privileges and honours of the kingdom which he designed to establish; and therefore, their understandings being darkened by prejudice and prepossession, they could not discern his character. The prophecies which were read in their synagogues every sabbath, marked out the time and circumstances of MESSIAH's appearance, the places which he should principally visit, the doctrine he should teach, and the works which he should perform: but though all these particulars exactly applied to Jesus, they obstinately rejected him, and proceeded to fulfil what was further foretold of his sufferings and death, with such a minute punctuality, as if they had designedly taken the prophecies for the rule of their conduct. Thus, by giving neither more nor less than thirty pieces of silver to his betrayer; by buying the potter's field, and no other, with the money afterwards; by casting lots for one of his garments, and making a distribution of the rest; by piercing his side, contrary to the custom in such punishments; and by omitting to break his legs, which, from their treatment of the malefactors who suffered with him, seems to have been usual—in these and several other instances, they acted, though unwittingly, as if it had been their design and study to accomplish the Scriptures, to their own confusion and condemnation.

II. This was the reason why his coming to his temple was to them *sudden*. Though long foretold and long expected, and though the precise time of his advent, and the accompanying signs, were accurately defined and described, yet when the season arrived he came suddenly, unlooked for, and unknown. He came upon them in an hour that they thought not of, and in a man-

ner of which they were not aware. When he stood in the midst of them, they knew not that it was he. How dreadfully does sin harden and infatuate the hearts of men! The Jews, in our Saviour's time, furnish us with a striking instance, that it is possible for people fatally to miscarry with the greatest advantages and means for information in their possession. They accounted themselves the people of God, made their boast of his law, and their relation to Abraham. But they hated MESSIAH, and crucified *him*, who was the object of Abraham's faith. The opposition of their leaders and teachers was the most malicious; for many of them acted against the light of their minds, and were often convicted in their consciences, though they refused to be convinced. But an ignorant attachment to these blind guides was ruinous to their blind followers; who, though they sometimes, from a view of his mighty works, were struck with astonishment, and constrained to say, "Is not this the Son of David?" were at length influenced by their priests to prefer a murderer to him, and, with a clamorous importunity, to compel Pilate to put him to death. The like misapprehensions produce the like effects among professed Christians at this day. *We* likewise have the Scriptures; but how many who admit their authority in words, live willingly ignorant of their contents, and act in direct contradiction to their tenour! The power of the Saviour is likewise displayed among us: his preached Gospel is daily made effectual to the great purposes for which it is vouchsafed, yet multitudes reject it with no less pertinacity than the Jews rejected him in person. At length death surprises them, and they sink into darkness beyond recall. To them the Lord may be said to come suddenly, for they think not of him till they actually

find themselves at his tribunal. And this not only when they are cut off by a sudden stroke, but often when their dissolution is most gradual, and every one about them can perceive its approach by their countenances; they themselves, though wasting with disease, and worn out with pain, still flatter themselves with hopes of amendment and recovery to their last gasp; and a lingering death is to them no less sudden than if they were killed by a flash of lightning.

III. It is asked, "Who may abide the day of his com-"ing?" The effect is compared to a refiner's fire, and to fuller's soap. The refiner's fire penetrates the metal, and thereby searches, discovers, and consumes the dross. The fuller's soap also, though it does not destroy the texture of the cloth, cleanses it by removing, and, as it were, consuming the spots and defilement which are found in it. The idea conveyed by these illustrations is the same. The day of his coming is a day of trial, a trial which issues in the purification of the work of God in his church, and in the detection and destruction of every thing in it which is contrary to his will.

The coming of MESSIAH may be taken in several senses.

To the Jews, according to the promise of God repeated from age to age, he came in person. "The Word "was made flesh, and dwelt among them*." The term in the original alludes to the visible symbol of the divine presence, which resided in the tabernacle and temple. Thus for a season he resided among them, in a temple not made with hands, but formed by the immediate agency of the Holy Spirit, in the womb of a virgin. This was a happy time to those who received and acknow-

* John i. 14.

ledged him. But the bulk of the nation could not abide the trial which his appearance exposed them to, they were proved by it to be but reprobate and counterfeit silver. The thoughts of many hearts were revealed *. Many specious characters were detected. The pretended sanctity and outward strictness of the Scribes and Pharisees, was evidenced to be mere hypocrisy. He exposed them in their true colours, and upon many occasions put them to shame and to silence. And where his word did not cleanse like soap, it burnt like fire, and the persons and places that rejected him were rendered inexcusable. Their great privilege of seeing his wonderful works, and hearing his gracious words, being abused, aggravated their guilt and condemnation, and made their doom heavier than that of Sodom and Gomorrah. To them the day of the Lord, which in their own sense they professed to desire, was darkness, and not light†. If he had not come and spoken to them himself, they had not had sin‡. That is comparatively; he found them great sinners, and they would have been such if he had not visited them. But after he had spoken to them, and spoken in vain, they had no cloak for their sin. From that time they were deprived of every shadow of plea, excuse, or extenuation. And all their former wickedness was light, compared with the enormous crime they were guilty of in rejecting and crucifying the Son of God. By refusing him, they rendered their case helpless and hopeless, because there is no other name but his, given among men, whereby they may be saved. But he cleansed those who received him, he removed their guilt, their fears, their ignorance. He gave them a clean heart, and a new spirit. Yet to these also he

* Luke ii. 35. † Amos v. 18. ‡ John xv. 22.

was as a refiner's fire, and as fullers' soap. They likewise had prejudices and selfish tempers, which were not at once removed. He called them to a state of suffering and self-denial, to forsake all, and to take up their cross daily for his sake.

In another sense, his coming is not restrained to a particular time. Wherever his Gospel is preached, the Lord is come. It is by the Gospel he rides forth prosperously, conquering and to conquer*. Thus he has promised to be present with his ministers, "and wherever two "or three are met in his name," to the end of the world. Thus he is come to us. And the effects are the same as when he was personally upon earth. His Gospel still discovers the thoughts of many hearts. Many persons who till then were reputed religious, by the contempt they cast upon this wonderful expedient of infinite wisdom and love to save sinners, manifest their ignorance and hatred of the law and holiness of God, and that the religion they pretend to is an empty lifeless form, destitute of life and power. To them, though in itself a savour of life, it proves a savour of death. It provokes their enmity, increases their obduracy, and leaves them without excuse. But it is life indeed to those who receive it. They are raised by it from a death of sin, unto a life of righteousness and peace. Their tempers, desires, pursuits, and hopes, are changed and elevated. Old things pass away, and all things become new to them, according as it is written, "If any man be in Christ "Jesus, he is a new creature†."

He comes to individuals by the power of his Spirit. This makes the word of his Gospel effectual. For the kingdom of God is not in word only, but in power.

* Psal. xlv. 4. † 2 Cor. v. 17.

When he thus visits the hearts of sinners, his word is like fire and soap; "quick and powerful, sharper than "a two-edged sword*." Then they feel and tremble, and cry out with the prophet, "Wo is me, I am un- "done." But in this way their dross is consumed, their defilement removed. When he thus wounds, he likewise heals. He gives them faith; by faith they look unto him, and are enlightened and saved.

We surely expect that he will come again. Not as he once came, in a state of humiliation. The Babe of Bethlehem, the Man of Sorrows, who hung, and bled, and died upon the cross for our sins, will return in glory. "Behold he cometh in the clouds, and every "eye shall see him†." Concerning this day, emphatically called the day of the Lord, we may well say, "Who may abide it?" To those who have not been the subjects of his refining operations here, he will then be a consuming fire. That great day, (for which all other days were made,) "when the Lord shall descend "with the voice of the archangel and the trump of "God, will burn like an oven, and all the proud, and "all that do wickedly, shall be as stubble," and the day that cometh "shall burn them up‡." Where then shall the impenitent ungodly sinner appear? But it will be a joyful day to them that love his appearing. He will arise upon them, as the Sun of Righteousness, with healing on his wings; he will wipe away their tears, vindicate their characters, acknowledge them before the assembled world, and say unto them, "Come, "ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom pre- "pared for you§."

* Heb. iv. 12. † Rev. i. 7.
‡ Mal. iv. 1. § Matth. xxv. 34.

IV. It is particularly said, "He will purify the sons "of Levi," that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness. "The Sons of Levi," the priests, the officiating ministers of God, "were gone out of the "way, and had corrupted the covenant of the Lord, "and thereby had caused many to stumble*; they dishonoured their office, and became themselves vile and contemptible. Thus they went on from bad to worse, till the men of that generation filled up the measure of the iniquity of their forefathers, by the rejection of MESSIAH. He also rejected them. The blasted barren fig-tree†, which withered to the very root at his word, was an emblem of their condition. In a little time, wrath came upon them to the uttermost; they saw the temple in which they had trusted, and which they had profaned, destroyed by fire, and the greater part of them perished. But a remnant of them was purified. We read, that after his ascension, a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith‡. And his apostles and disciples were sent forth with a new spirit, and in a new character, to offer and to serve in righteousness. The purport of this passage has been repeatedly exemplified under the Christian dispensation. A declension from the simplicity and purity of worship, principles, and morals, was visible very early in the church. The progress of it was rapid, especially from the time of Constantine. When persecution ceased, and a tide of wealth and worldly honours flowed in upon those who, by their profession, were bound to be patterns of humility and self-denial to others; from that period till the Reformation, eccle-

* Mal. ii. 8, 9. † Matth. xxi. 19. ‡ Acts vi. 7.

siastical history affords us little more than a detail of such instances of pride, intrigue, oppression, and cruelty, under the pretext of religion, as had not been known among the Heathens. And the nations which were relieved from the chains and darkness of Popery at the Reformation, did not long preserve much more than a name and a form to distinguish them. In most countries the state became the *idol* of the church, and the church the *creature* of the state. How it is with us in this nation, I need not say. Facts speak for themselves. It is a mournful fact, that the ministry is become contemptible; nor is it difficult to assign the cause. But we are favoured with the Gospel, and are eye-witnesses of its purifying power. It still produces the effects which marked its progress when it was preached by the apostles. It enlightens the dark mind, softens the hard heart, heals the wounded spirit; and many persons who before were burdensome to society, are rendered by it ornamental and useful. When every other argument and motive has failed of success, the consideration of the mercies of God in Christ, revealed by the Gospel, constrains the believing sinner to present himself a living, willing, holy sacrifice unto God. Thus being purified by the blood of Jesus, he offers to the Lord a sacrifice in righteousness. Such principles and aims are essential to a Christian minister. He knows the terrors of the Lord, and has tasted of his goodness. He is constrained by love, the love of Christ, and the love of souls. He preaches, as the apostle did, Jesus Christ, and him crucified; a subject which, though despised and reproached by the formal Jew and the sceptical Greek, is evidenced by its efficacy to be the wisdom and power of God. Such ministers may be, and

frequently are, depreciated, and disregarded; but they cannot be contemptible, until integrity, benevolence, and usefulness are the proper objects of contempt.

SERMON V.

IMMANUEL.

ISAIAH vii. 14.

Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name IMMANUEL, GOD WITH US.

THERE is a signature of wisdom and power impressed upon the works of God, which evidently distinguishes them from the feeble imitations of men. Not only the splendour of the sun, but the glimmering light of the glow-worm, proclaims his glory. The structure and growth of a blade of grass, are the effects of the same power which produced the fabric of the heavens and the earth. In his word likewise he is inimitable. He has a style and manner peculiarly his own. What he is pleased to declare of himself by the prophet, may be prefixed as a proper motto to the whole revelation of his will in the Bible. "My thoughts are "not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, "saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than "the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, "and my thoughts than your thoughts*." This superiority of his thoughts to ours, causes a proportionable difference in his manner of operation. His ways are above our conceptions, and often contrary to them.

* Isa. lv. 8, 9.

He sometimes produces great effects, by means which, to us, appear unsuitable and weak. Thus he gave Gideon a complete victory, not by providing him an army equal to that of the enemy, but by three hundred men furnished with earthen pitchers and lamps*. At other times the greatness of his preparations, intimates that there are difficulties in the case, insuperable to any power but his own, where our narrow apprehensions, until enlightened and enlarged by his teaching, can scarcely perceive any difficulty. It is eminently so with respect to the restoration of fallen man to his favour. We have but slight thoughts of his holiness, and therefore are but slightly affected by the evil of sin. But though he be rich in mercy, no wisdom but his own could have proposed an expedient, whereby the exercise of his mercy toward sinners might be made to correspond with his justice and truth, and with the honour of his moral government. His Gospel reveals this expedient, and points out a way in which mercy and truth meet together; and his inflexible righteousness is displayed, in perfect harmony with the peace of sinners who submit to his appointment; and thus God appears, not only gracious but just, in receiving them to favour. This is the greatest of all his works, and exhibits the most glorious discovery of his character and perfections. The means are answerable to the grandeur of the design, and are summarily expressed in my text.

I shall not take up your time with attempting to clear the difficulties which have been observed in the context. It may suffice for my purpose to affirm, that this passage expressly and exclusively refers to MESSIAH; for which my warrant is, the authority of the evangelists Matthew

* Judges vii. 19, 20.

and Luke*, who directly apply it to him, and assure us that it was accomplished in him. If sinners are to be saved, without injury to the honour of his law and government, (and otherwise they must perish,) two things are necessary.

I. That "a virgin shall conceive, and bring forth a "son."

II. That this son of the virgin shall have a just right to be called *Immanuel, God with us.*

1. "A virgin shall conceive, and bring forth a son." The Mediator, the surety for sinful men, must himself be a man. Because those whom he came to redeem were partakers of flesh and blood, he therefore took part of the same. Had not MESSIAH engaged for us, and appeared in our nature, a case would have occurred, which I think we may warrantably deem incongruous to the Divine Wisdom. I mean, that while fire and hail, snow and vapour, and the stormy wind fulfil the will of God; while the brutes are faithful to the instincts implanted in them by their Maker; a whole species of intelligent beings would have fallen short of the original law and design of their creation, and indeed have acted in direct and continual opposition to it. For the duty of man, to love, serve, and trust God with all his heart and mind, and to love his neighbour as himself, is founded in the very nature and constitution of things, and necessarily results from his relation to God, and his absolute dependence on him as a creature. Such a disposition must undoubtedly have been *natural* to man before his fall, as it is for a bird to fly, or a fish to swim. The prohibitory form of the law delivered to Israel from Mount Sinai, is a sufficient in-

* Matt. i. 23.; Luke i. 31, 32.

timation that it was designed for *sinners*. Surely our first parents, while in a state of innocence, could not stand in need of warnings and threatenings to restrain them from worshipping idols, or profaning the name of the Great God whom they loved. Nor would it have been necessary to forbid murder, adultery, or injustice, if his posterity had continued under the law of their creation, the law of love. But the first act of disobedience degraded and disabled man, detached him from his proper centre, if I may so speak, and incapacitated him both for his duty and his happiness. After his fall it became impossible for either Adam or his posterity to obey the law of God. But MESSIAH fulfilled it exactly, as a man, and the principles of it are renewed, by the power of his grace, in all who believe on him. And though their best endeavours fall short, *his* obedience to it is accepted on their behalf; and he will at length perfectly restore them to their primitive order and honour. When they shall see him as he is, they will be like him, and all their powers and faculties will be perfectly conformed to his image.

Again, MESSIAH must not only be a man, but a partaker of our very nature. It had been equally easy to the power of God to have formed the body of the second Adam, as he formed the first, out of the dust of the earth. But though, in this way he would have been a true and perfect man, he would not have been more nearly related to us than to the angels. Therefore, when "God sent forth his Son to be made under "the law, to redeem us from the curse of the law, that "we might receive the adoption of children*," and be re-admitted into his happy family, "he was made of a

* Gal. iv. 4, 5.

"woman." Thus he became our *Goel*, our near kinsman, with whom the right of redemption lay.

But further, if he had derived his human nature altogether in the ordinary way, from sinful parents, we see not how he could have avoided a participation in that defilement and depravity which the fall of Adam had entailed upon all his posterity. But his body, that holy thing, conceived and born of a virgin, was the immediate production of God. Therefore he was perfectly pure and spotless, and qualified to be such "a high "priest as became us, holy, harmless, undefiled, and "separate from sinners*:" who needed not, as the typical high priests of Israel, "to offer up sacrifice, "first for his own sin, and then for the sins of the "people†." These difficulties were obviated by a virgin's conceiving and bearing a son. His obedience was without defect, his nature without blemish, and having no sin of his own, when he voluntarily offered himself to make an atonement for the sins of his people, his sacrifice was, so far, answerable to the strict and extensive demands of the law and justice of God.

Let us make a solemn pause, and call upon our souls to admire and adore the wisdom and power of God in this appointment. Thus, "the Lord created a new "thing upon the earth!"

II. But surely our admiration and gratitude will be raised still higher, if we rightly understand the latter part of my text. This son of the virgin shall be called "Immanuel, God with us." Though the human nature of Christ was absolutely perfect, his obedience commensurate to the utmost extent of the law, and his substitution and sufferings for sinners voluntary; yet,

* Heb. vii. 26. † Heb. vii. 27.

had he been no more than a man, he would not have been equal to the great undertaking of saving sinners. A due consideration of the majesty, holiness, authority, and goodness of God, will make sin appear to be, as the apostle expresses it, "exceedingly sinful*." Whoever has a right sense of the nature and effects of that rebellion against the Most High, which the Scripture intends by the term *Sin*, will not need many arguments to convince him, that the Mediator between God and man, must be possessed of such dignity and power, as cannot be attributed to a creature, without destroying the idea of a created and dependent being, by ascribing to him those perfections which are incommunicably divine.

If MESSIAH had been a sinless and perfect man, and no more, he might have yielded a complete obedience to the will of God, but it could have been only for himself. The most excellent and exalted creature cannot exceed the law of his creation. As a creature, he is bound to serve God with his all, and his obligations will always be equal to his ability. But an obedience acceptable and available for others, for thousands and millions, for all who are willing to plead it, must be connected with a nature which is not thus necessarily bound. A sinner, truly convinced of his obnoxiousness to the displeasure of God, must sink into despair, notwithstanding the intimation of a Saviour, if he were not assured by the Scripture, that it was a divine person in the human nature who engaged for us. It is this alone affords a solid ground for hope, to know that he who was before all, by whom all things were made, and by whom they consist, assumed the nature

* Rom. vii. 13.

of man; that the great Lawgiver himself submitted to be under his own law. This wonderful condescension gave an immense value and dignity to all that he did, to all that he suffered; thus he not only satisfied but honoured the law. So that we may, without hesitation, affirm, that the law of God was more honoured by MESSIAH, in his obedience to it, during the few years of his residence upon earth, and terminated by his last and highest act of obedience in submitting to the death of the cross, than it could have been by the unsinning obedience of all mankind to the end of time.

But MESSIAH was not only to obey the law for us, he was likewise to expiate, to sustain, and to exhaust, the curse due to sin*. In this attempt, no mere creature could have endured. Nor could the sufferings of a creature have been proposed to the universe, to angels and men, as a consideration sufficient to vindicate the righteousness and truth of God in the remission of sin, after he had determined and solemnly declared that "the wages of sin is death." The apostle assures us, that "it is impossible for the blood of bulls and of "goats to take away sin†." They who differ from the apostle in their judgment, who think it very possible for God, if he pleased, to forgive the sinner who should offer a bull or a goat, or even without any offering, by the sovereign exercise of his mercy, may be reminded, that the question is not simply what God *can* do, but what it *becomes him* to do, agreeable to his perfections, and to his character as governor of the world. Of this his infinite wisdom is the only competent judge; and we learn from his word, that it is impossible any blood, but that of his own Son, can cleanse us from guilt, or

* Gal. iii. 13. † Heb. x. 4.

save us from misery. The blood of a bull or a goat, of a man or an angel, (if angels could bleed,) are all equally insufficient to the great purpose of declaring his righteousness, of manifesting to all intelligent creatures, his inflexible displeasure against sin, in the very act of affording mercy to sinners. But since the atoning blood is the blood of Immanuel, of him who is God with us; the sinner who makes it his plea, builds his hope upon a rock which cannot be removed; and, obtaining forgiveness in this way, he likewise obtains by it such a knowledge of the heinousness of sin, as disposes him from that hour to fear, hate, and forsake it.

But though forgiveness be an essential part of salvation, it is not the whole. We cannot be happy, except the power of sin be likewise destroyed. A well grounded hope in the mercy of God, is connected with a thirst for sanctification, and a conformity to his image. But neither this hope nor this desire are natural to us. Our case requires the help of an almighty arm, of the power which can cause the "blind to see, the deaf to hear, the "dead to arise;" which can take away the heart of stone, and create a heart of flesh. So, likewise, the difficulties attendant on our Christian profession, arising from the spirit of the world around us, the snares to which we are exposed in every situation, our weakness, the deceitfulness of our hearts, the subtilty, vigilance, and power of our spiritual enemies, are so many and great, that unless he, on whom we depend for salvation, be able to save to the uttermost, we can have no security, either for our progress, or our perseverance, in the grace of God. Unless the Saviour of sinners be omnipresent, omniscient, unchangeable, "the same yesterday, to day, and for ever," that is, unless he be God, how can he answer the prayers, satisfy the wants, and relieve the distresses of all who trust

in him in every age, and of all who in every place equally need his support at the same moment? Or how can he engage to give rest to every weary soul, to secure them from perishing, and to bestow upon them eternal life? David comfortably concluded, that because the Lord was his shepherd, he should not want, and had no reason to fear*, not even when passing through the valley of the shadow of death. To us Jesus is made known as the great Shepherd of the sheep; but how can we place the like confidence in him, unless we likewise are assured that our shepherd is the Lord?

I shall not attempt to vindicate this doctrine largely from the exceptions of those who call themselves men of reason. It is a point of revelation, and it is expressly revealed. It demands our assent upon the authority of God, who requires us to receive this record which he has given us of his Son. Thus far it approves itself to our reason, that however difficult it may be to our conceptions, yet thus it must be, upon a supposition that sinners can be saved without prejudice to the honour of the divine government. If we affirm that he who was born in a stable, and suffered as a malefactor upon Mount Golgotha, is the true God and eternal life, many will think it a hard saying. But it is the doctrine of Scripture, the very pillar and ground of truth; the only foundation of hope for an awakened conscience, the only standard by which we can properly estimate the evil of sin, the worth of the soul, and the love of God. We do not, however, say, that the human nature of Christ, considered in itself, possesses the attributes of Deity, or is the proper object of worship; nor do we suppose that God could suffer, bleed, or die. But we say, with the apostle,

* Psalm xxiii. 1. 4.

"that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto him-"self*." We believe that the human nature was so intimately and indissolubly united to the divine, that the properties and actings of each nature are justly ascribed to the one person of Christ, God-man, "Immanuel, God with "us." Thus we read that the final judgment of the world is committed to a man, and that "God hath purchased "his church with his own blood.†"

Behold then the character of MESSIAH in this prophecy! a man! a God! a divine person in the human nature. "God manifested in the flesh! Immanuel, God "with us."

As fallen creatures, we had lost the true knowledge of God, and were unable to form such conceptions of his greatness and goodness, as are necessary to inspire us with reverence, to engage our confidence, or produce obedience to his will. His glory shines in the heavens and fills the earth; we are surrounded by the tokens of his power and presence; yet, till we are instructed by his word, and enlightened by his Holy Spirit, he is to us an *unknown God.* The prevalence of idolatry was early, and, (with an exception to the people of Israel,) soon became universal. Men who boasted of their reason, worshipped the sun and moon, yea, the works of their own hands, instead of the Creator. And even where revelation is vouchsafed, the bulk of mankind live without God in the world. But he is known, trusted, and served, by those who know MESSIAH. To them his glory is displayed in the person of Jesus Christ‡. His agency is perceived in the creation, his providence is acknowledged, and his presence felt as *God with us.*

* 2 Cor. v. 19. † Acts xvii. 31.; Acts xx. 28.

† 2 Cor. iv. 6.

As fallen creatures, God is against us, and we are against him. The alienation of our hearts is the great cause of our ignorance of him. We are willingly ignorant. The thoughts of him are unwelcome to us, and we do not like to retain him in our knowledge. Guilt is the parent of atheism. A secret foreboding, that if there be a God, we are obnoxious to his displeasure; and that if he takes cognizance of our conduct, we have nothing to hope, but every thing to fear from him, constrains many persons to try to persuade themselves that there is no God; and many more to think, or at least to wish, that if there be a God, he does not concern himself with human affairs. What a proof is this of the enmity of the heart of man against him! that so many persons who would tremble at the thought of being in a ship, driven by the winds and waves, without compass or pilot, should yet think it desirable, if it were possible, to be assured, that in a world like this, so full of uncertainty, trouble, and change, all things were left at random, without the interference of a supreme governor. But this enmity, these dark apprehensions, are removed, when the Gospel is received by faith. For it brings us the welcome news, that there is forgiveness with him; that God is reconciled in his Son to all who seek his mercy. In this sense, likewise, MESSIAH is "Immanuel, God with "us," on our side, no longer the avenger of sin, but the author of salvation.

"Immanuel" is "God with us," God in our nature still. He suffered as a man, and as a man he now reigns on the throne of glory; exercising all power and authority, and receiving all spiritual worship both in heaven and upon earth. He is the head of all principalities and powers, thrones and dominions. Thus man is not only saved, but unspeakably honoured and ennobled. He is

brought into the nearest relation to him, who is over all blessed for ever. The angels adore him; but only redeemed sinners can say, "He loved us and gave himself for us; he has washed us from our sins in his own "blood*;" he is our Saviour, our Shepherd, our Friend, our, "Immanuel, God with us."

I shall conclude with a few obvious reflections which offer from this important subject.

What a cold assent is paid to the doctrine of the Godhead of Christ by many who profess and receive it as a truth! They have received from education, from books or ministers, what is called an orthodox scheme of religious sentiments, and with this they are contented. They have not been accustomed to doubt of it, and therefore take it for granted that they really believe it. But as I have already hinted, it is so contrary to our natural apprehensions, that no man can, from his heart, say that "Jesus Christ is Lord," unless he be taught of God. And a cordial belief of this point will and must produce great and abiding effects. They who know the Saviour's name, will so trust in him, as to renounce every other ground of confidence. They will love him supremely, and forsake every thing that stands in competition with his favour. They will glory in his cross, they will espouse his cause, and devote themselves to his service. They will make continual application to him, that they may receive out of his fulness grace according to their need. They will obey his precepts, and walk in his Spirit. Happy were it indeed, if all who join in repeating the Creed, and who bow their knee at the mention of his name, were thus minded. But the lives, tempers, and pursuits of thousands, give too sure an evidence, that when they

* Gal. ii. 20.; Rev. i. 5.

express their assent with their lips, they neither know what they say, nor whereof they affirm. Their acknowledgment of his character has no more salutary influence, than that of the evil spirits when he was upon earth, who said, and perhaps with a much fuller conviction, "We "know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God*."

2. What a strong foundation does this doctrine afford for the faith and hope of those who indeed know MESSIAH, and have put their trust in him. This truth is the rock upon which the church is built, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. "If God be for us, who "shall be against us?" The difficulties of our warfare are great, the enemies of our peace are many. The world may frown, and Satan will rage; but Jesus has overcome the world, and is greater than all our foes. He will guide his people with his unerring wisdom, support them with his almighty arm, supply them out of the inexhaustible riches of his grace, revive them when fainting, heal them when wounded, plead for them above as their great high priest, manage for them upon earth as their great shepherd, and at last make them more than conquerors, and give them a crown of life!

3. On the contrary, how dreadful must be the state of those who finally reject him, and say in their hearts, "We will not have this man to rule over us!" He is now proposed as a Saviour, he invites sinners to come to him, that they may have life; and assures us, that "him that cometh he will in nowise cast out†." Happy are they who hear and obey his voice to-day, while it is called to-day. To-morrow is uncertain. Death may be at the door, and at death our state will be determined for eternity. They who refuse him now, in the

* Mark i. 24. † John vi. 37.

character of a Saviour, must then appear at his tribunal, and stand before him as their Judge; and must answer, in their own persons, for all their transgressions of the holy law, and for their contempt of the Gospel of the grace of God!

SERMON VI.

SALVATION PUBLISHED FROM THE MOUNTAINS.

ISAIAH xl. 9.

O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountains: O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid: say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!

IT would be improper to propose an alteration, though a slight one, in the reading of a text, without bearing my testimony to the great value of our English version, which, I believe, in point of simplicity, strength, and fidelity, is not likely to be excelled by a new translation of the *whole* Scripture. But there are, undoubtedly, particular passages, where a small change in the expression might render the sense clearer, and be equally answerable to the original Hebrew or Greek. The address of this verse as it stands in the *Messiah* is, *O thou that tellest good tidings*, &c. as the bishop of London has lately translated it. Zion and Jerusalem are considered by the prophet, not as bringing, but as receiving good tidings; and the publisher of these good tidings is written with a feminine construction. The sense may be thus expressed, "Let her "that bringeth good tidings to Jerusalem and Zion,

" get up into the high mountains and lift up her voice." But the apostrophe is more animated. That it was the custom in Israel for the women to publish and celebrate good news with songs and instruments, is well known. We have an early instance in the book of Exodus. When the Lord had delivered them from the power of Pharoah, and they saw their enemies, who had so lately threatened them, dead upon the sea-shore, " Miriam, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her " hand, and all the women went out after her with " timbrels and with dances; and Miriam answered " them, Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed " gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown " into the sea*." So afterwards, " when David re- " turned from the slaughter of the Philistines, the wo- " men came out to meet him and Saul, with tabrets and " instruments of music; and they answered one ano- " ther as they played, Saul hath slain his thousands, " and David his ten thousands†." Thus likewise Deborah, in her sublime song, represents the mother of Sisera‡, and her women, singing alternately, from a confident, though vain expectation, that Sisera would return a conqueror. In my text, the prophet in prospect of MESSIAH's appearance, speaks of it as an event suited to excite a general joy. The Gospel, (as the word imports,) is good news, glad tidings indeed! the best news that ever reached the ears, or cheered the heart of man. The women are, therefore, called upon to proclaim his approach, on the tops of the hills and mountains from whence they may be seen and heard to the greatest advantage, for the spreading of the tidings throughout the whole country. Zion is as

* Exod. xv. 20, 21. † 1 Sam. xviii. 6, 7. ‡ Judges v. 28, 29.

a besieged city; but let her know that relief is at hand; say unto her, "behold your God!" The Lord God will come with a strong hand, or against the strong one, and his people shall know him as their shepherd, full of care, kindness, and power.

The promise of "Immanuel, God with us," is now to be spread like the morning from the tops of the mountains. The day is breaking, and this passage prepares for the following, "Arise, shine; for thy light is "come!" The welcome news is to be dispersed from Jerusalem to Samaria, from Jew to Gentile, from one kingdom to another people, till all the nations and ends of the earth "shall see the salvation of God*."

The cause of this exultation arises from the character of MESSIAH, compared with the design of his appearance, and this is answerable to the condition in which he finds mankind.

The deplorable state of fallen man by nature, is largely described both in the Old Testament and in the New. It may suffice to take notice of three principal features which characterize our whole species, and apply to every individual of the race of Adam, until the grace of God, which bringeth salvation, affords relief. These are Guilt, Alienation of Heart, and Misery.

1. *Guilt.* All have sinned. We are the creatures of God. He made us, and he preserves us. Our life, faculties, and comforts, are all from him. He is, therefore, our great Lord, our supreme Benefactor. Of course we belong to him. His we are, and not our own. It follows, that dependence, gratitude, submission, and obedience, are incumbent on us, as they must be upon all intelligent creatures, from the very nature

* Psalm xcviii. 3.

of things. The relation which subsists between an infinitely wise and good Creator and his creatures, if capable of knowing him, necessarily implies the subjection: and the obligation is indissoluble. But we have evidently broken this law of our creation. We have violated the order of God's government. We have implicitly, if not formally, renounced our allegiance, disowned his right over us, and set up for ourselves. A dependent creature affecting independence; a worm presuming upon its own power, making itself its own end; a rebel against the divine government, boasting of morality and goodness, and trusting to his own conduct to recommend him to the favour of his Maker; a being formed for immortality, proposing his whole happiness in things which he feels to be unsatisfying, knows to be uncertain, and from which he is conscious he must, in a few years at most, be finally removed; these are solecisms which strongly prove the depravity, degeneracy, and demerit of man. It is possible, that had we been wholly left to ourselves, we should never have been aware, while in this world, of the just and inevitable consequences of our rebellion. Having lost all right thoughts of God, and conceiving of him, as if he were altogether like ourselves, we might have felt neither fear nor remorse. But there is a revelation, by which we are informed of his determined purpose to avenge disobedience, and to vindicate the honour of his government; and we are assured, that he is not an indifferent spectator of our opposition to his established order. His justice and truth are engaged to punish transgressors, and our obnoxiousness to punishment, is what we mean by *guilt*. If the Scripture be true, there is no way of escape, unless he himself be pleased to appoint one. This he has done; and the declaration of

this appointment is a part of the good tidings contained in my text. Proclaim it from the tops of the mountains, that there is forgiveness with him. Say unto Jerusalem, Behold MESSIAH, Behold your God! He comes to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself*. He *can* do it, for he is God; and he *will* do it, for he has taken on him our nature for this very purpose†. "Behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of "the world!"

2. *Alienation of mind.* Not only is it true that we have sinned against the Lord, but a principle of aversion from him is deeply rooted in our hearts. Therefore one part of our natural character is, "haters "of God‡." This is thought a hard saying. Many who will admit that their conduct is blameable, and that they are not altogether what they ought to be, will by no means plead guilty to this charge. If they fall short of their duty, and in some instances transgress his commandment, they say, it is their infirmity; they are sorry, and hope to do better some time or other. However, they are willing to think that their hearts are tolerably good, they mean well, and are shocked at the idea of hating God. They rather presume that they love him, though they are not so careful to please him as they should be. I do not assert that we hate God under that character which our vain imaginations form of him. If we can persuade ourselves, in direct contradiction to the testimony of Scripture, that he is not strict to mark what is amiss; that he will dispense with the strictness of his law; that he will surely have mercy upon us, because we are not openly abandoned and profligate in our conduct; that he will accept of lip-

* Heb. ix. 26. † 2 Cor. v. 21. ‡ Rom. i. 30.

worship in which the heart has no concern, reward us for actions in which we had no intention of pleasing him, permit us to love and serve the world with all our mind, and soul, and strength, while we live, and make us happy in another world, when we can live in this no longer; if we form such an image of God, it is too much like our own to provoke our enmity, for it is destitute of holiness, justice, and truth. But "the carnal "mind is," and must be, "enmity against God*," according to the character he has given of himself in his word. We have an inbred dislike to all his moral attributes, to the rule of his government, and to the methods of his grace. We cannot, that is, we will not, propose either his glory as our chief end, or his favour as our chief good. The proof is plain. The ends which we actually pursue, and the supposed good which we deliberately prefer, are utterly inconsistent with the plan which he has prescribed for us. His ways, though truly pleasant in themselves, appear unpleasing to us, and we think we can plan better for ourselves. We do not like "to retain God in our "thoughts†," which is a sure sign of enmity. Nay, this enmity is so strong in us naturally, that we cannot bear others should think more highly of God than we do, or be more attached to him than we are. This was the ground of the first murder. Abel loved God, and God was pleased to testify his approbation of Abel, and therefore Cain killed him‡. This has been the great cause of the opposition and ill-treatment which the servants of God have met with from the men of the world in all succeeding ages: a cause which still subsists, and will continue to operate upon posterity yet

* Rom. viii. 7. † Rom. i. 28. ‡ 1 John iii. 12.

unborn. Can we show a stronger mark of dislike to a person, than by hating all who profess a regard to him, and when that is the only cause of our resentment? Such is the prevailing enmity against God. For how often do we see that when his grace enables a sinner to forsake the spirit and practice of the world, his former friends are immediately offended; and, perhaps, those of his own household become his inveterate enemies?

But, "O thou that bringest good tidings, lift up thy "voice." Say to poor sinners, "Behold your God!" He comes to take this enmity away! The cross of Christ subdues it, when every other expedient has been found ineffectual. The heart, too hard to be softened by a profusion of temporal benefits, and too stout to be subdued by afflictions, is melted by the dying love of a Saviour, and by that discovery of the divine perfections which is exhibited in redemption. We have a striking instance of this effect, in the case of Saul of Tarsus*. His misguided conscience, under the influence of prejudice, persuaded him, "that he ought to do many "things against Jesus of Nazareth." Instigated with rage, and not satisfied with the injuries he had offered to his disciples at Jerusalem, but "still breathing out "threatenings and slaughter," he journeyed towards Damascus, designing to harass and persecute them wherever he found them. In this temper of mind, he was suddenly arrested on his way, by a light, and a voice from heaven. He fell to the ground. But Jesus, whom he had ignorantly persecuted, instructed him in the knowledge of his person and love, pardoned his sin, and commissioned him to preach the faith he had laboured to destroy. How sudden, how evident, how

* Acts ix. 1—20.

abiding, was the change which then took place in his heart and in his conduct! From that moment he accounted "all things loss and dung, for the excellency "of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord*." Unwearied by labour and hardship, undismayed by opposition and danger, he spent the remainder of his life in the cause of his Master; and, like Cæsar, accounting nothing done while any thing remained to do, his active and intrepid spirit was continually meditating new services†. And, though he knew that bonds and afflictions awaited him in every place, he was always upon the wing, to publish to his fellow-sinners the grace and glory of him whom he had so long opposed, only because he knew him not. And although the circumstances attending the apostle's case were extraordinary, the case itself, as to the substance, is not singular. I trust many persons in this assembly have been the subjects of a like change. The doctrine which Paul preached, has enlightened your understandings, has inspired you with hopes and desires to which you were once strangers, and given a new direction to the conduct and aims of your life. You were once afar off from God, but you are now brought nigh by the blood of Christ. You once lived to yourselves, but now you feel that you are no longer your own, and have devoted yourselves to him who died to save you from the present evil world, and from the wrath to come.

3. *Misery.* If we are guilty in the sight of God, and alienated from him in our hearts, we must be miserable. Guilt entails a burden, and a foreboding of evil upon the conscience. And our alienation from the fountain of living waters‡, compels us, (for we are in-

* Phil. iii. 8. † Acts xix. 21. ‡ Jer. ii. 13.

sufficient to our own happiness,) to seek our resources from broken cisterns, and pits which will hold no water. Further, sin has filled the world with wo. The whole creation travails and groans; and natural evil is inseparable from moral, as the shadow from the body. Though the earth be filled with tokens of the goodness, patience, and forbearance of God, it likewise abounds with marks of his displeasure. I think we have sufficient reason to attribute earthquakes, hurricanes famine, and pestilence, to sin, as their original and proper cause. We can hardly conceive, that if mankind had continued in that happy state of love and obedience to God in which our first parents were created, they would have been exposed to such calamities. When God at the beginning surveyed every thing that he had made, "behold it was very good*." All was beauty and harmony, till sin introduced disorder and a curse. But far worse than what we suffer immediately from the providence of God, are the evils which we bring upon ourselves and upon each other. The dreadful consequences of war, rapine, discord, hatred, ambition, avarice, and intemperance, furnish part of every page in the mournful history of human life, and are felt in every nation, city, village, and family. Want, cares, and diseases, prey upon individuals. Disappointment, dissatisfaction, vanity, and vexation of spirit, are experienced by persons of every rank, and in every stage of human life. How much more desirable would it be, were it not for the hope of the Gospel, to share with the brute creation, than to bear the name of man in his fallen state! The brutes have few wants; their propensities, and the means of gratifying them, are suited

* Gen. i. 31.

to their natures, adapted to their powers, and conducive to the preservation of the species. They neither regret the past, nor tremble under apprehensions of the future. It is far otherwise with man. His boasted pleasures end with a sting, and often he cannot bear his own reflections on them. He suffers almost as much from imaginary fears, as from real afflictions. The more he possesses, the more are the sources of his anxieties multiplied and enlarged. And after having been long wearied with a train of mortifications, pains, and inquietudes, he must at last, however unwilling, yield to that stroke of death, the thought of which, when strongly realized to his mind, was always sufficient to embitter the happiest hours of his life.

But publish the glad tidings from the mountains, and let the joyful sound diffuse over the plain—"Your "God cometh." MESSIAH establishes a new, a spiritual kingdom upon the earth, and his happy subjects are freed from the misery in which they were involved. They commit all their concerns to him, and he manages for them. Their fears are removed, their irregular desires corrected, and all that is really good for them, is secured to them by his love, promise, and care. Afflictions still await them, but they are sanctified. To them the nature of afflictions is changed. They are appointments graciously designed for their advantage. Their crosses, no less than their comforts, are tokens of God's favour*; they have them only because their present situation requires discipline, and they could not be so well without them. They are assured of support under them†, and a final deliverance out of them all, for there is a happy hour approaching, when all their

* Heb. xii. 6, 7. † 2 Cor. xii. 9.

troubles shall cease, and they shall enter upon a state of eternal, uninterrupted, inconceivable joy*.

For these purposes the Son of God was revealed. The prophets saw his day afar off, and proclaimed his approach—"Thy God cometh!" Though truly a man, he is truly God. Neither man nor angel could remove our guilt, communicate to us a spiritual life, relieve us from misery, and give us stable peace in a changing world, hope and triumph in death, and eternal life beyond it. But his wisdom and power are infinite, and his purpose unchangeable. He would not have invited the weary and heavy laden to come to him, if he was not able and determined to give them rest. None that seek him are disappointed, or sent empty away: a sufficient proof that his compassion, his bounty, his fulness, are properly divine. Therefore the apostle, speaking of the riches of his grace, uses the epithet, "Unsearchable†." His treasury of life and salvation is inexhaustible, like a boundless, shoreless, bottomless ocean; like the sun, which having cheered the successive generations of mankind with his beams, still shines with undiminished lustre, is still the fountain of light, and has always a sufficiency to fill innumerable millions of eyes in the same instant.

Does the language of my text cause joy to spring up in your hearts? or is it nothing to you? If you heard the *Messiah*, you were, perhaps, affected by the music of the passage; how much are you to be pitied, if you are hitherto unaffected by the sentiment! Yet once more, hear;—"Thy God cometh!" He did come in the fulness of time, according to the prophecy; and the word of prophecy assures us, that he will come again.

* Isa. lx. 20.; Rev. xxi. 4. † Ephes. iii. 8.

"Behold he cometh in the clouds; and every eye shall "see him, and they also that pierced him*."—"Pre- "pare to meet thy God†."

SERMON VII.

THE MORNING LIGHT.

ISAIAH lx. 1—3.

Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee: and the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.

ONE strong internal proof that the Bible is a divine revelation, may be drawn from the subject matter; and particularly that it is the book, and the only book, which teaches us to think highly and honourably of God. I say, the only book; for there is no right knowledge of God where the Bible is not known. What is the Jupiter of Homer, compared with the God of Israel, as he is represented to us by his servants the prophets? And if the Heathen philosophers, in some detached passages, have sentiments not altogether unworthy of him, history honestly tells them how they obtained them. They travelled, and they are generally said to have travelled into Phœnicia or Egypt, to the confines of that people who alone thought rightly of God, because to them only he had made himself known by a revelation. If such a description as we have in the fortieth chapter of Isaiah,

* Rev. i. 7. † Amos iv. 12.

from the twelfth verse to the end, had been known only of late years, recovered, we will suppose, out of the ruins of Herculaneum, there is little doubt but it would have engaged the attention and admiration of the learned world. For the most admired writings of antiquity, upon a candid comparison, are unspeakably inferior to it. The inimitable sublimity of the prophets is natural, just, and unforced, and flows from the grandeur of their subjects, because they were influenced by him who alone can speak worthily of himself.

> A song so vast, a theme so high,
> Calls for the voice that tun'd the sky.

With them, the whole compass of the creation is but as dust upon the balance, in respect of the great Creator. His purpose is fate, his voice is power. He speaks, and it is done. Thus he called the universe into being; and thus, as the great Lord and Proprietor of all, he still maintains and governs it, directing the frame of nature, and every particular event and contingence, to the promoting of his own glory, the last and highest end of all his works.

The principal of these is, the exhibition of his perfections in the person of his Son. The prophecies we have already considered, announce this event with a gradual increase of clearness and precision, as the period of accomplishment is supposed to draw nigh. We lately heard the command to proclaim his approach from the hills and tops of the mountains. Here the prophet begins to contemplate the effects of his actual appearance. The earth is considered as involved in a state of gross darkness; but the sun, the Sun of Righteousness, is about to arise, and to fill it, by his beams, with light,

life, and glory. These effects, indeed, will not extend to all, for many will love darkness rather than light. But he will not shine in vain. There will be a people prepared to receive him, and to rejoice in his light. They shall arise as from sleep, as from the grave, and his light reflected upon them shall cause them to shine likewise. Darkness shall still cover those who reject him; yea, their darkness will be increased. But the glory of the Lord shall be seen upon all who believe, and their numbers from age to age shall be enlarged. Nations shall come to him; and kings shall be subservient to the spreading of his kingdom. Such is the scope of the passage before us. I shall briefly consider a few of the leading particulars contained in it.

I. As the sun is the source of light to the natural world, so is MESSIAH to the moral and spiritual world. Light, and its opposite, darkness, are figuratively used in Scripture. The latter is applied to a state of ignorance, sin, and misery, as in the following texts: "He that walketh in darkness, knoweth not whither he "goeth*." "If we say that we have fellowship with him, "and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth†." "Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness; "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth‡." The former, therefore, signifies true knowledge, holiness, and happiness. "Ye were sometime darkness, but now are ye "light in the Lord: walk as children of light§." When "I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me‖." "Light is sown for the righteous, and joy for the upright "in heart**." I select but one instance of each kind;

* John xii. 35. † 1 John i. 6. ‡ Matth. xxv. 30.
§ Eph. v. 8. ‖ Micah vii. 8. ** Psal. xcvii. 11.

an attentive reader of the Scripture will meet with many expressions of a like import. But there is likewise an intermediate state; light advancing from the early dawn to the perfect day. This twilight, no less than day-light, is from the sun. Such was the state of the Old Testament Church. MESSIAH was the source of their knowledge, hope, and joy; but he was, (if I may so speak,) below the horizon, as to them.—Though believers, under that dispensation, were a people saved of the Lord, they were trained up under types and shadows, were influenced by a spirit of comparative bondage and distance, like children under age, and rather longed for, than actually possessed, the gracious liberty which the children of God enjoy under the Gospel. But the sun arose, and the shadows vanished, when the Son of God incarnate dwelt and conversed with men, honoured his temple with his personal presence, and superseded all the Levitical sacrifices, by the one offering of himself upon the cross. "The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth "came by Jesus Christ." But more especially we date the beginning of his visible kingdom from the day of Pentecost, which followed his ascension. Then he signally bestowed the gifts which, as Mediator, he had received for men, and by the power of his Holy Spirit, authorized and qualified his servants to go forth and preach salvation in his name. Then the partition-wall between Jew and Gentile was taken away, "and his righteousness "was openly shown in the sight of the Heathen." Abraham, Moses, Elijah, and other servants, of God, had been highly favoured and highly honoured; but we are assured by our Lord himself, that none born of woman had been greater than John his fore-runner—and yet he added, "the least in the kingdom of heaven," that is, in

the New Testament or Gospel church, "is greater than "he*." The apostles were happy in the peculiar privilege of attending on his person; yet he told them, "It is "expedient for you that I go away†." There were still greater privileges depending upon the influence of the promised Comforter, who was to abide with the church for ever. By the power of his Holy Spirit, the Lord is now present with all his ministers and people in every place, whether retired in secret from the view of men, or assembled together in his name‡; and though the great events upon which their hopes are founded, his life, passion, death, resurrection, and ascension, took place long ago, he so realizes the declaration of them in his word to their hearts, that they are no less assured of what they read, than the apostles who saw him with their own eyes. Thus the Gospel-state is a dispensation of light. The Sun is risen with life and healing in his beams, and they who have the eyes of their understanding opened, enjoy a bright and marvellous day. They see, admire, adore, rejoice, and love.

II. The subjects of MESSIAH's kingdom, the living members of his church, are so irradiated by him, that they shine likewise; as the moon shines, but with a borrowed light derived from the sun. "Beholding, "in this glass, the glory of the Lord, they are changed "into the same image from glory to glory§," according to the measure and growth of their faith. Two points may be observed under this head.

1. *The fact;* that they do thus shine. Though they were once darkness, they are now light‖. A dark, ignorant, wicked, selfish Christian, is a contradiction in

* Matth. xi. 11. † John xvi. 7. ‡ Matth. vi. 6.; xviii. 20.
§ 2 Cor. iii. 18. ‖ Eph. v. 8.

terms. There *may be* such, there *are* too many such, amongst those who make profession of the name of Christ; but they who truly know him, "walk in the "light, as he is in the light." They have knowledge, "a good understanding*." Perhaps the greater part of real Christians have little acquaintance with the literature and science of the world; their moral capacities may be weak, and not improved by education; they may be in the esteem of men, as they are in their own, but babes; yet they know more than the wisest philosophers who are destitute of the grace of God. They know themselves, they know the Lord, they know the evil of sin, and the way of salvation; what their proper happiness consists in, and how it is to be obtained. They have learned to endure affliction, to forgive injuries, and to overcome evil with good. They have attained a just sense of the vanity of the world, and the importance of eternity. They are instructed to be contented and useful in their stations, to discharge their duties in relative life with propriety, and to meet death with comfort. In all these particulars, many who have dazzling talents, and are celebrated for abilities and endowments, are miserably at a loss. True believers are conformed to the spirit and temper of their Saviour, and therefore are different and distinguished from the world around them. And they have, at least, the beginnings of true peace and solid happiness, in communion with him whom they serve.

2. *The cause.* They shine wholly by his light. If their own words may be taken, the proof of this is easy. They are free to confess that they are only wise by his wisdom, strong by his power working in them,

* Psal. cxi. 10.

and that without him they "have not sufficiency to "think a good thought*." Experience has taught them that they cannot stand unless he upholds them, nor watch unless he watcheth with them, nor be safe or happy a single day, without fresh communications from him. But this their experience and acknowledgment, is the express and current doctrine of Scripture. There is a real, though mystical, union between Christ and his people. "He is the vine†," they the branches: he is their head, they the members of his body. They dwell in him by faith, he dwells in them by his Spirit. He is their root and their life; all their springs are in him, and it is out of his "fulness that they receive‡." Therefore the apostle says, "I live, yet not I, but "Christ liveth in me§." "I can do all things through "Christ strengthening me‖." And our Lord himself, who comforted Paul with that promise, "My grace is "sufficient for thee," apprised all his followers of their entire dependence upon him, by saying, "Without me "ye can do nothing**." The language of the Old Testament is to the same purport, "they looked unto him, "and were enlightened††." "In the Lord *Jehovah* I "have righteousness and strength‡‡." "He giveth pow- "er to the faint, and to them that have no might he in- "creaseth strength§§." Thus things are constituted and conducted, "that no flesh should glory in his presence, but that he who glorieth may glory in the Lord‖‖."

III. They who wilfully refuse and turn from this light, do thereby involve themselves in double darkness,

* 2 Cor. iii. 5. † John xv. i. ‡ John i. 16.
§ Gal. ii. 20. ‖ 2 Cor. xii. 9. ** John xv. 5.
†† Psal. xxxiv. 5. ‡‡ Isa. xlv. 24. §§ Isa. xl. 29.
‖‖ 1 Cor. i. 29—31.

and become more infatuated and wicked than those to whom the light has not been proposed. Their evils, likewise, are more aggravated than they would have been if the light had not visited them. Thus our Lord, MESSIAH, speaks of the Jews; "If I had not come and "spoken unto them, they had not had sin; but now "they have no cloak for their sin*." And again, "For "judgment I am come into this world, that they which "see not might see, and that they which see might be "made blind†." He came to make the ignorant wise unto salvation; but they who, from a proud conceit of their own wisdom and sufficiency, disdain his instruction, being left to themselves, gave abundant evidence that the light they boast of is but gross and palpable darkness. The grossest errors, the greatest obduracy of heart, the most extreme profaneness of spirit, and the most abominable wickedness in practice, may be expected, and will certainly be found, where the Gospel is despised.

It is evident, that the morality which is so highly admired by the Christian world, and set in opposition to the Gospel of Christ, is much leaner, and more scanty, than the morality of the Heathens. I speak of the idea only; for neither have the Heathens of old, nor of the present day, acted up to their own rules. But I do not hesitate to affirm, that none of our modren moralists who have disowned the Gospel revelation, have given us a system of morality equal to that of Tully the Pagan. Many of the Heathens acknowledged the desirableness and necessity of revelation; though infidels, born in a Christian land, think it a high mark of their wisdom to despise it; and avowed atheists, that is, men

* John xv. 22. † John ix. 39.

who deny either the Being or the Providence of God, or the obligations mankind are under to obey him, are seldom to be met with but in countries where the Bible is known. The heart must have obstinately and repeatedly resisted light and conviction, before it can ordinarily proceed to these dreadful lengths. But while the blind stumble in the noon of day, MESSIAH's people shall walk in confidence and peace*, and shine as lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation†.

IV. The third verse of this chapter foretels, and therefore secures, the conversion of the Gentiles or Heathens. The times and the seasons are in the disposal of God, but the Scriptures must be fulfilled. Much was done in the first age of Christianity. A single instrument, the apostle Paul, as he himself informs us, preached the faith, which he formerly laboured to destroy, "from Jerusalem round about to "Illyricum‡," and probably much further afterwards. And the Lord, who appointed him to this service, accompanied his message with his own power; so that he had signal success in turning men from darkness to light, and from the worship of dumb idols, to serve the living and true God; and in planting the Gospel, and gathering churches in every province. The Gospel found an early reception at Rome, which facilitated its spread into the different parts of the Roman empire. And we have reason to believe it was introduced into our island in a few years after our Lord's ascension. And though what was called the conversion of Heathen nations, in some following ages, went little further than to prevail on them to assume the name of Christians, and left them, considered as nations, as destitute of the

* Psal. lxxxix. 15, 16. † Phil. ii. 15. ‡ Rom. xv. 19.

spirit and blessings of Christianity as it found them; yet, I cannot doubt, that wherever the New Testament, and the sufferings of MESSIAH, were known, some individuals, at least, experienced a real and saving change. And we are warranted to hope for still greater things; for a time when the gross darkness, which as yet covers a great part of the world, shall be dispelled; and the Redeemer's kingdom spoken of by Daniel the prophet, as "a stone cut out without hands, shall become a great "mountain, and fill the whole earth*." But this pleasing subject will come more directly under our consideration hereafter.

V. The call in my text may be taken in a general sense, like that of the apostle, "Awake, thou that "sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall "give thee light†." Natural light requires eyes to perceive it. It would be absurd to point out the beauties of an extensive prospect to a blind man. To him the face of nature presents only a universal blank. But the light of the Gospel not only discovers the most important objects to those who can see, but has a marvellous efficacy to open the eyes of the blind. It is the appointed instrument of Divine Power for this purpose. In vain would be the labour and expectation of the husbandman, if God did not afford the rain and the snow, to water the earth, and the enlivening influences of the sun, to draw forth the tender blade, and to ripen the corn. Equally unsuccessful would the preaching of the Gospel prove to sinful men, though in itself it be eminently the truth and wisdom of God, exactly suited to their state, and of the highest importance to their welfare, if he had not promised that his word, where

* Dan. ii. 35. † Eph. v. 14.

simply and faithfully delivered, in dependence upon his blessing, shall not be spoken in vain, but shall certainly accomplish the end for which he has sent it*. This promise, together with the experience of its truth in our own case, and our knowledge of its uniform effects in every age and country where the doctrine of the cross has been preached, encourages ministers to persevere in publishing the glad tidings, in defiance of all the opposition and disappointments we meet with. We lament, but cannot wonder, that the Gospel is so generally neglected. As a dispensation of grace, it offends the pride of man; as a dispensation of holiness, it contradicts his desires and passions. His spirit is degraded, his heart is pre-engaged, he loves the present world, and has no more taste or inclination for a life of communion with God here, and such a heaven as the Scripture proposes hereafter, than the beasts of the field. But the Lord has said "I will work, and who "shall let it†?" When he is pleased to clothe the word preached, with the influence of his Holy Spirit, and to apply it to the conscience, it is quick, powerful, penetrating, and irresistible as lightning; it conveys a voice, which the deaf, yea, the dead, must hear: it forces a light upon the mind which cannot be evaded. Then things are seen as they are. The nature and desert of sin is apprehended, and then the Gospel is found to be the only balm for a distressed and wounded conscience. Therefore, having the Lord's command and promise, we are not to be discouraged by the carelessness or obstinacy of those who know not what they do. We are aware of the difficulty, yea, the impossibility of succeeding in our endeavour to save the souls

* Isa. lv. 10, 11. † Isa. xliii. 13.

of our hearers, if we had only to depend upon our own arguments or earnestness. We are not to reason, but to obey. Our business is to deliver our message, and in our happier moments to water it with our prayers and tears. When we have done this, we can do no more. The event must be left with him in whose name we speak. We must not suppress nor disguise what we are commanded to declare; nor wilfully make any additions of our own, to accommodate it to the taste or prejudice of our hearers*. Let those preach smooth things who will venture to answer, at the great tribunal, for the souls that have miscarried under their ministry; *we dare not*. Let those be ashamed of the Gospel of Christ†, who feel no obligations to him for his dying love; *we cannot*, and, by the grace of God, *we will not*. We will glory in it. "God forbid that we should glory "in any thing" else‡! Like Ezekiel, we are commanded to preach and prophesy to dry bones; and he who sends us can cause the dry bones to live. "O "ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord§." The word of his salvation is sent to you. "The Lord is "risen indeed!" "Arise, shine; for your light is come." In his name we proclaim pardon and peace to all who will seek him. But seek him to-day, while it is called to-day; to-morrow is not yours. Seek him now, while he may be found. Harden not your hearts. Tremble, "lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, "any of you should finally come short of it‖."

* 2 Cor. iv. 2. † Rom. i. 16. ‡ Gal. vi. 14.
§ Ezek. xxxvii. 4. ‖ Heb. iv. 1.

SERMON VIII.

THE SUN RISING UPON A DARK WORLD.

ISAIAH ix. 2.

The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.

CONTRASTS are suited to illustrate and strengthen the impression of each other. The happiness of those who, by faith in MESSIAH, are brought into a state of peace, liberty, and comfort, is greatly enhanced and heightened by the consideration of that previous state of misery in which they once lived, and of the greater misery to which they were justly exposed. They are not only made "meet to be partakers of the inherit-"ance of the saints in light *;" but they have been delivered from the powers of darkness. Thus, while they have communion with God as a Father, they contemplate their privilege with a greater pleasure, than they probably could do if they had never known a difference. They remember a time when they were "afar off, without hope, and without God in the world;" and they remember how carelessly they then trifled upon the brink of destruction. In this deplorable and dangerous situation they were "found of the "Lord, when they sought him not†." He convinced, humbled, and pardoned them, and brought them near to himself, into a state of adoption and communion by

* Col. i. 12, 13. † Isa. lxv. 1.

the blood of Jesus. The admiration, gratitude, and love, which they feel for this undeserved grace, gives them a more lively sense of the blessings they enjoy. Yea, the thought of what they have been redeemed from, (of which they will then have a much clearer perception than at present,) will add to their joys in heaven, and inspire such a song of praise as will be peculiar to themselves, and in which the holy angels, who never felt the stings of guilt, nor tasted the sweetness of pardoning mercy, will not be able to join them. They are accordingly represented, in the prophetical vision, as standing nearest to the throne, and uniting in the noblest strains of praise to him who sitteth upon it*; while the surrounding angels can only take part in the chorus, and admire and adore, when they behold the brightest displays of the glory of the wonder-working God, manifested in his love to worthless, helpless sinners.

These opposite ideas are joined in my text. The people who are spoken of as rejoicing in a great light, were, till this light arose and shone upon them, *in darkness;* walking, sitting, living in darkness, and in the land of the shadow of death. That this passage refers to MESSIAH, we have a direct proof. The evangelist† refers it expressly to him, and points out the time and manner of its literal accomplishment. I shall first consider the literal sense and completion of the prophecy, and then show how fitly it applies to the state of mankind at large, and to the happy effects of the Gospel of salvation; which, by the blessing of God, has been the instrument of bringing multitudes of many nations, peoples, and languages, out of a state of gross "dark-"ness, into marvellous light‡."

* Rev. v. 9—12. † Matth. iv. 15, 16. ‡ 1 Pet. ii. 9.

I. Hebrew words, (like many in our own language,) have often more than one signification. But only one sense can be expressed in a version. And therefore interpreters and translators frequently differ. Which of the different words, used to express the meaning of the same original term, is most happily chosen, may be sometimes decided by the context. The two words in the first verse of this chapter, rendered "lightly afflicted," and "grievously afflicted," signify likewise, the one to think lightly of, to account vile; and the other, to honour, to render honourable and glorious. Both these words occur in one verse, and are used in these senses, in the Lord's message to Eli, "Them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall "be lightly esteemed*." Had the same words been thus rendered in the passage before us, the sense of both verses would, I think, have been more plain, connected, and consistent, to the following purport, agreeable to the translation given by Vitringa, and the present bishop of London. "Nevertheless there shall not "be dimness [or darkness] as in the time of her vexation or distress. He formerly debased [made light "or vile] the land of Zebulon and Naphtali, but in the "latter time he hath made it glorious, even [the land] "by the way of the sea, beyond Jordon, Galilee of the "Gentiles. [For] The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light," &c.—Such was the afflicted and low state of Galilee previous to the coming of MESSIAH; such was the exaltation and honour it derived from his appearance.

1. The land allotted to the tribes of Issachar, Zebulon, and Naphtali, was chiefly included in the province,

* 1 Sam. ii. 30.

which, upon a subsequent division of the country, obtained the name of Galilee. The northern part of it, the inheritance of Naphtali, was the boundary or frontier towards Syria, and had been frequently vexed and afflicted when the sins of Israel brought the armies of their enemies upon them, as frontier countries usually suffer most in times of invasion and war. Particularly this part of the land, called Galilee of the Gentiles, was the first and most immediately exposed to the ravages of Tiglath-Pileser, and Sennacherib. And as the people there were likewise more mixed with foreigners, and at the greatest distance from the capital, Jerusalem, on these accounts Galilee was lightly esteemed by the Jews themselves. They thought "no prophet could arise in Galilee*." It even prejudiced Nathaniel against the first report he received of Jesus as MESSIAH, that he lived, and was generally supposed, (by those who were content to be governed by popular rumour, without inquiring attentively for themselves,) to have been born in Galilee. He asked, with an appearance of surprise, "Can any good thing "come out of Nazareth†?" They were accounted a rude, unpolished, provincial people. And therefore, when Peter would have denied any acquaintance with his Lord, he was discovered to be a Galilean‡ by his dialect and manner of speech.

2. This despised and least valued part of the land of Israel, was the principal scene of MESSIAH's life and ministry, insomuch, that, as I have observed, he was supposed to have been born there; a mistake which his enemies industriously supported and made the most of: for those who could persuade themselves that it was so in fact, would think themselves justified in rejecting his

* John vii. 52. † John i. 46. ‡ Mark xiv. 70.

claim; it being one undeniable mark of MESSIAH, given by the prophet Micah, "that he was to be born in "Bethlehem of Judah*." He was, however, brought up at Nazareth, and lived for a time in Capernaum, towns in Galilee; but both of so little repute, that, had they not been connected with his history, it is not probable that their names would have been transmitted to posterity.

3. But by his residence there, Galilee was honoured and ennobled. He himself declared, that on this account, "Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum," (though probably none of them were more than inconsiderable fishing towns,) "were exalted even to heaven.†" Those were highly privileged places which our Lord condescended to visit in person; so likewise are those places where he is pleased to send his Gospel. I have observed formerly, and make no apology for repeating a truth so very important, and so little attended to, that "the glorious "Gospel of the blessed God‡," when faithfully preached and thankfully received and improved, renders an obscure village more honourable, and of more real consequence, than the metropolis of a great empire, where this light shineth not. For what are the "dark places "of the earth§," however celebrated for numbers and opulence, for the monuments of ambition and arts, but habitations of cruelty, infatuation, and misery!

4. Though Galilee was favoured with the Scripture, and with Synagouge-worship, and the inhabitants were a people who professed to know the God of Israel, it was a land of darkness at the time of MESSIAH's appearance. Though they were not idolaters, ignorance prevailed among them. The law and the prophets were read in the

* Micah v. 2. † Matth. xi. 21—23.
‡ 1 Tim. i. 11. § Psal. lxxiv. 20.

synagogues; but we may believe to little good purpose, while they were under the direction of perverse teachers, who substituted the traditions of men for the commands of God. The single circumstance of keeping herds of swine, as the Gaderenes did, seems a proof that the law of Moses was but little regarded by them. They, as well as the people of Judea, were under the guidance of the Scribes and Pharisees in their religious concerns, who were, if I may use a modern phrase, the clergy of that time; and these, we are assured by him who knew their hearts, were generally corrupted, "blind leaders of "the blind." Yet they were held in ignorant admiration, and implicitly submitted to. From the character of the public ministers of religion, we may, without great danger of mistake, infer the character of the people who are pleased and satisfied with their ministrations. "As "the disciple cannot," ordinarily, "be expected to be "superior to his Master*;" the religion of the Scribes may be taken as a standard of that of the Galileans, who were instructed by them: yet these were the people among whom MESSIAH chiefly conversed; so that his enemies styled him a Galilean, and a Nazarene, as a mark of reproach and contempt. Many of his apostles, perhaps the most of them, were Galileans likewise. "He seeth "not as man seeth†." The most of his immediate followers, while upon earth, were such as men despised, on account of their situation, rank, or callings; publicans and sinners, fishermen and Galileans. This was, among other reasons, for the encouragement of the poor, the destitute, the despised, the miserable, and the guilty, in succeeding ages, who should desire to put their trust in his name, and to implore his mercy. To those who re-

* Luke vi. 40. † 1 Sam. xvi. 7.

ceived him, he was the light, the true light; he relieved them from the ignorance, wickedness, and distress in which he found them. They, on their parts, bore testimony to him. They saw and acknowledged his glory. They felt his power, and devoted themselves to his service. Thus much for the literal sense.

II. But this prophecy is not to be restrained to the first and more immediate season of its accomplishment. The Lord speaks thus of MESSIAH in another place, "It is a light thing that thou shouldst be my servant, "to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the "preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light "to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation "to the ends of the earth*." And there are many declarations of a like import. He is still "the light of the "world†," though no longer visible and conversant with men. By the influence and power of his Spirit, he is still present wherever his Gospel is known. This his word of grace and truth he sends where he pleases, and with a discrimination not unlike that which he observed when he was upon earth. The Gospel is preached to the poor. Courts and palaces are seldom favoured with it. While he passes by many great cities, many habitations of the wise and wealthy, he is known in villages and cottages. His condescension and favour to those who are unnoticed by the world cannot be too highly extolled. That the others are excluded from the same benefits, is more properly to be ascribed to their obstinacy than to his will. They exclude themselves. "He stands at the door and knocks‡." His word is within their reach; his ministers are within their

* Isa. xlix. 6. † John viii. 12. ‡ Rev. iii. 20.

call. They might easily enjoy every mean and help which the Gospel provides for sinners, if they pleased; but they do not please. They are either engaged in a round of sensual pleasure, or engrossed by studies and pursuits, which possess their hearts, and fill up their thoughts and time, so that they have neither leisure nor inclination to attend to the things which pertain to their peace. Instead of inviting his Gospel to them, they too frequently employ their power and influence to discountenance, and, if possible, to suppress it. They have their choice. The great and the gay will not receive his message; it is therefore sent to the poor, and to the wretched, and they will hear it. Yet as he visited Jerusalem in person, and taught there, so London likewise is favoured with the light of his Gospel. But, alas! "how few believe the report?" They who do experience the change described in my text. Their darkness is changed into marvellous light.

Mankind, till enlightened by the word and spirit of grace, are truly in a state of darkness. Thick darkness is a vail which conceals from us, not only distant, but the nearest objects. A man in the dark cannot perceive either friend or enemy; he may be in great danger, yet think himself in safety; or, if he thinks himself in danger, be unable to take any step for his preservation, from a want of light. Thus, though God be our maker and preserver, though "in him we live, move, and have "our being," though we are surrounded with his presence, and proofs of his wisdom and goodness are before us wherever we turn our eyes, yet we live without him in the world. Equally ignorant we are of ourselves, of the proper happiness of our nature, or how it is to be attained. We know neither the cause, nor the

cure, nor the consequences of our proneness to cleave to the dust, and of placing our affection on inadequate and unsatisfying objects.

And if we suppose a person awakened to a conviction of the evil of sin, and to understand that nothing less than the favour of God can make a rational and immortal creature happy, still without the Gospel he "would be in darkness and the shadow of death." His case may be compared to that of a person shipwrecked upon some desert, inhospitable coast, suffering great horrors and anxiety, from his exposedness to perish by hunger, by enemies, or wild beasts—who, if he saw, at no very great distance, an island, and was, by some means, informed and assured that island was the seat of safety, plenty, and pleasure; and that if he was once there, his dangers would all cease, and his utmost wishes be satisfied; still, if there were neither bridge, nor boat, nor any means by which he might arrive thither; to know that happiness was so near him, yet inaccessible to him, would but aggravate his misery, and make his despair more emphatically pungent. Miserable, indeed, must we be, if we clearly perceived that only He, whose creatures we are, can make us happy, and that as sinners we have forfeited his favour, and are utterly incapable of regaining it, if we were left under these views without any hope of relief. Such must have been our situation sooner or later, if "God, who "is rich in mercy," had not himself provided the means of reconciliation. For though a hope of pardon, is easily taken up by those who are ignorant of the holiness of God, and the malignity of sin; yet nothing but a declaration from himself, that there is forgiveness with him, can give peace to a truly awakened conscience.

But Jesus dispels this darkness, and "brings life and "immortality to light by the Gospel." For,

1. The office and agency of the Holy Spirit, so absolutely necessary to make us duly sensible, either of our danger, or of the possibility of escaping it, is entirely the effect of his mediation. The soul of man, originally formed to be the temple of the living God, when defiled by sin, was justly forsaken by its great inhabitant; and, since the fall, answers the prophetical description given of Babylon: it "is become the ha-"bitation of devils, the hold of every foul spirit, and a "cage of every unclean and hateful bird*." If we ask, as with good reason we may, How can the wise and holy God, "who is of purer eyes than to behold ini-"quity," and with whom evil cannot dwell, return to his sanctuary thus polluted and profaned? an answer is afforded in that gracious promise, "I will sprinkle "clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from "all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I "cleanse you; and I will take away the stony heart, "and I will give you an heart of flesh, and," in order to this, "I will put my Spirit within you†." But the source of this mercy is his sovereign love and purpose, to give the seed of the woman, his only Son, to be the mediator of sinners. By his atonement to be manifested in due time, but which had a virtual influence from the beginning, the Holy Spirit returned to dwell with men.

2. His obedience unto death, when revealed by the Holy Spirit to the enlightened conscience, affords a clear and satisfactory discovery of reconciliation with

* Rev. xviii. 2. † Ezek. xxxvi. 25, 26.

God: it shows, that on his part every hindrance to the free exercise of mercy is thereby removed, the honour of his law vindicated, and the demands of his justice answered. On our parts, by opening a door of hope, it removes that enmity and obduracy of heart, which are nourished by a consciousness of guilt, and a secret foreboding of deserved punishment. But when the dignity of the Redeemer's person, the causes, nature, and design of his sufferings are understood, emotions of admiration, love, and gratiude, till then unknown, are felt, and obstinate sinners "are made a willing people "in this day of divine power."

3. The doctrine of the cross pours a light upon every subject and circumstance in which we are concerned. It enlarges the mind, and forms the judgment and taste, agreeable to the standard of truth, and the real nature of things. It rectifies those prejudices and prepossessions which dispose us to mistake "good "for evil, and evil for good*," to pursue trifles with earnestness, and to trifle with things of the greatest importance. In Jesus Christ crucified, "all the treasures "of wisdom and knowledge" are at once both hidden and exhibited. This object, the holy angels, whose knowledge of the wonders in creation, without doubt, greatly surpasses our conceptions, incessantly contemplate with delight, as affording the brightest displays "of the manifold wisdom of God†." It is especially the fountain of wisdom to sinners. They look unto him and are enlightened. The slight and partial thoughts they once entertained of the great God, the mistaken judgment they formed of themselves, of their state and their conduct, are corrected by their knowledge of the

* Isa. v. 20. † Eph. iii. 10.

cross; from thence they derive a solid hope, a humble spirit, just views of their duty and obligations, and motives and prospects which animate them in a course of cheerful, persevering obedience to the will of God.

4. In this way, God, as revealed in Christ, is apprehended and chosen, as the chief and proper good of the soul. Thus the poor are enriched with "the pearl "of great price," and the weary obtain rest. The mind, no longer burdened with anxiety, nor mortified with a succession of disappointments, which attended the vain pursuit of happiness in earthly things, possesses present peace, and rejoices in the expectation of future glory. It is released from the slavery of "hewing out broken "cisterns," and introduced to the "fountain of living "waters." Or, to close with the beautiful image in my text, "The people who once walked in darkness and "the region of the shadow of death," are translated into the kingdom of life and salvation*.

How greatly are they to be pitied who reject the light of the Gospel! It is true, they cannot see it; but it is equally true, they will not. But may I not hope that this is a day of divine power, in which some of you shall be made a willing people? Do not reason against your own life, but repent and believe the Gospel. The light shines around you, whether you perceive it or not; and it has an efficacy to open the eyes of the blind.—Where the Gospel is preached, the Lord is present. If you call upon him, he will hear, and you shall receive your sight. If the grace and the glory of the Saviour have hitheto made no impression upon your heart, you are spiritually blind. Could you be sensible of your disorder, the remedy is at hand. If now at last you

† Col. i. 13.

are willing to seek him, he will be found of you. But if you deliberately prefer darkness, your state is awfully dangerous; and if you persist in your obstinacy, your ruin is unavoidable. God is gracious and long-suffering, but he will not be mocked*. Humble yourself at once, and implore his mercy, or else prepare to meet him in judgment. But be assured he will not meet you as a man. You must either bend or break. The Lord forbid that he should say to any of you, in the great day of his appearance, "Depart from me, ye "cursed, into everlasting fire!"

SERMON IX.

CHARACTERS AND NAMES OF THE MESSIAH.

ISAIAH IX. 6.

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called, Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

SUCH was the triumphant exultation of the Old Testament church! Their noblest hopes were founded upon the promise of MESSIAH; their sublimest songs were derived from the prospect of his advent. By faith, which "is the substance of things hoped for," they considered the gracious declarations of the faithful unchangeable God as already accomplished, though the actual performance respected a period, as yet, future and distant; especially as believers, under that dis-

* Gal. vi. 7.

pensation, already felt the influence of the redemption which MESSIAH was to consummate in the fulness of time. It was the knowledge of his engagement on the behalf of sinners, that gave life and significancy to all the institutions of the ceremonial law, which otherwise, though of divine appointment, would have been a heavy and burdensome yoke*. Isaiah therefore prepares this joyful song for the true servants of God who lived in his time; and though it was a day of trial and rebuke, they were provided with a sufficient compensation for all their sufferings, in being warranted to say, "Unto "us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the "government shall be upon his shoulder," &c.

This ancient song is still new. It has been, and will be taken up from age to age, by the New Testament church with superior advantage. I trust many of you understand it well, and rejoice in it daily. Men naturally look for something wherein to rejoice and glory. Little reason have the wise† to glory in their supposed wisdom, or the strong in their fading strength, or the rich in their transitory wealth; but this is a just and unfailing ground of glory to true Christians, that "Unto "us a child is born, unto us a son is given," &c.

When a sinner is enlightened by the Holy Spirit, to understand the character and offices of MESSIAH, his ability and willingness to save those who are ready to perish, and the happiness of all who are brought into subjection to his gracious government; and when he begins to feel the cheering effects of faith in his name, then this song becomes his own, and exactly suits the emotions and gratitude of his heart. But many persons will despise and pity him as a weak enthusiast.

* Acts xv. 10. † Jer. ix. 23.

And yet, perhaps, they do not think so unfavourably of the rapture of Archimedes, of whom it is related, that having suddenly discovered the solution of a difficult problem while he was bathing, he was so transported with joy, that he forgot his situation, sprung instantly from the bath, and ran through the city crying, "I "have found it! I have found it!" He is not usually charged with madness on this account, though the expression of his joy was certainly over-proportioned to the cause. The truth is, the world will allow of a vehemence approaching to ecstasy, on almost any occasion, but on that alone which, above all others, will justify it. A person who would be thought destitute of taste, if he was unaffected by the music to which this passage is set, would, at the same time, hazard his reputation for good sense, with some judges, if he owned himself affected by the plain meaning of the words. Incompetent judges surely! who are pleased to approve of warmth and emotion of spirit, provided the object be trivial, and only condemn it in concerns of the greatest importance! But, I trust, the character of my auditory is very different, and that the most of you desire to enter into the spirit of this passage, and to have a more lively sense of your own interests in it. May the Lord grant your desire, and accompany our meditations upon it with his power and blessing!

Every clause in this passage might furnish subject for a long discourse; but my plan will only permit me briefly to touch upon the several particulars, which will lead to a recapitulation or summary of what has been already considered more largely concerning the person, offices, and glory of MESSIAH. We have,

I. His incarnation. "Unto us as child is born;" in our nature, born of a woman: "Unto us a son is

"given," not merely a man-child, but emphatically, *a son*, the Son of God. This was the most precious gift, the highest proof and testimony of divine love. The distinction and union of these widely-distant natures, which constitute the person of Christ, the God-man, the Mediator, is, in the judgment and language of the apostle, the "great mystery of godliness*," the pillar and ground of truth. I shall not repeat what I have already offered on this point in the fifth sermon. It is the central truth of revelation, which, like the sun, diffuses a light upon the whole system, no part of which can be rightly understood without it. Thus the Lord of all humbled himself, to appear in the form of a servant, for the sake of sinners.

II. His exaltation. "The government shall be upon "his shoulder." In our nature he suffered, and in the same nature he reigns. When he had overcome the sharpness, the sting of death, he took possession of the kingdom of glory as his own, and opened it to all who believe in him. Now we can say, He who governs in heaven and on earth, and whom all things obey, is "the child who was born, the son who was given for "us." Some subsequent passages will lead us, hereafter, to contemplate more directly the glory of the Redeemer's administration in the kingdoms of providence and grace. At present, therefore, I shall only observe, that the exaltation of the Redeemer infers the dignity and security of the people who are united to him by faith. They have, in one respect, an appropriate honour, in which the angels cannot share. Their best friend, related to them in the same nature, is seated upon the throne of glory. Since he "is for them, who

* 1 Tim. iii. 16.

"can he be against them?" What may they not expect, when he who has so loved them as to redeem them with his own blood, "has all power committed unto "him, both in heaven and on earth!" For,

III. The names and characters here ascribed to him, are not only expressive of what he is in himself, but of what he is engaged to be to them.

1. "His name shall be called Wonderful." In another place the word is rendered "Secret*." It is true of him in both senses. He is *Wonderful* in his person, obedience, and sufferings; in his grace, government, and glory. So far as we understand his name, the revelation by which, as by a name, he is made known, we may, we must, believe, admire, and adore. But how limited and defective is our knowledge! His name is *Secret*. Who can "by searching find him out†?" His greatness is incomprehensible, his wisdom untraceable, his fulness inexhaustible, his power infinite "No one "knoweth the Son, but the Father." But *they* have a true, though not an adequate knowledge of him, who trust, love, and serve him; and in their view he is *Wonderful!* The apostle expresses the sentiment of their hearts, when he says, "Yea, doubtless, I count "all things but loss and dung for the excellency of the "knowledge of Christ Jesus the Lord."

2. Another of his names is "Counsellor." The great councils of redemption, in which every concern respecting the glory of God, and the salvation of sinners, was adjusted, were established with him, and in him, before the foundation of the world. And he is our Counsellor or Advocate with the Father, who pleads our cause, and manages all our affairs in perfect righteousness, and with

* Judges xiii. 18. † Job xi. 7.

infallible success; so that no suit can possibly miscarry which he is pleased to undertake. To him likewise we must apply, (and we shall not apply in vain,) for wisdom and direction, in all that belongs to our duty and the honour of our profession in the present life. In all our difficulties, dangers, and cares, we must look to him for guidance and support. This is to be wise unto salvation. His secret is with them that consult him; so that, though the world may deem them weak and ignorant as babes, (and he teaches them to think thus of themselves,) they have a cheering and practical knowledge of many important subjects, which are entirely hidden from those who are wise and prudent in their own eyes.

3. "He is the Mighty God." Though in the office of Mediator, he acts in the character of a servant, his perfections and attributes are truly divine. Only the Mighty God could make a provision capable of answering the demands of the holy law, which we had transgressed. Only the Mighty God could be a suitable Shepherd to lead millions of weak helpless creatures to glory, through the many difficulties, dangers, and enemies they are exposed to in their passage. Add to this, the honour, dependence, and obedience, which this great Shepherd claims from his sheep, are absolute and supreme; and they would be guilty of idolatry, if they did not know that he is the *Mighty God.* Though real Christians, who are enlightened and taught by the Holy Spirit, may, and do differ in their views and explanations of some revealed truths, I conceive they must be all agreed in this point. It is not only necessary to be known as the only solid foundation of a sinner's hope, but it immediately respects the object of divine worship. For if the Redeemer is not possessed of

the incommunicable perfections of Deity, the New-Testament, in its most obvious and literal signification, would be chargeable, not only with countenancing, but with expressly teaching and enjoining idolatry.

4. Further, he shall be called the "Everlasting Father." "He is not ashamed to call them brethren*," having condescended to assume their human nature. But they are also his *children*. They are born into his family by the efficacy of his own word and Spirit. From him they derive their spiritual life, being united to him by faith, and receiving from first to last out of his fulness. And he is an "Everlasting Father." Our fathers, according to the flesh, are subject to death. But his relation to them subsists unchangeably, and therefore they cannot be destitute; and he is thus equally to them all. *They* live upon the earth, and are removed from it, in a long succession of ages; but *He* is the Father of the everlasting age, "the same yesterday, to-day, and "for ever." "All generations shall call him blessed." To him, therefore, the apostle teaches us to apply that sublime passage of the Psalmist, "Thou, Lord, in the be-"ginning hast laid the foundation of the earth, and the "heavens are the work of thy hands†. They shall "perish, but thou remainest; and they shall wax old "as doth a garment; and as a vesture shalt thou fold "them up, and they shall be changed; but thou art "the same, and thy years shall not fail‡."

5. Lastly, He shall be called "the Prince of Peace," whose sovereign prerogative it is, to "speak peace to "his people§;" and there is no peace deserving the name, but that which he bestows. The Scripture expressly

* Heb. ii. 11. † Psal. cii. 25—27.
‡ Heb. i. 10—12. § Psal. lxxxv. 8.

declares, "There is no peace to the wicked*." By whatever name we call that thoughtless security and insensibility, in which mankind generally live, while ignorant of God and of themselves, we cannot allow it to be peace. It is the effect of blindness and hardness of heart; it will neither bear reflection nor examination. Can they be said to possess peace, however fatally regardless they may be of futurity, who are at present under the dominion of restless, insatiable, and inconsistent passions and appetites? But the kingdom of MESSIAH is a kingdom of peace, and in him his happy subjects enjoy "a peace which passeth all understanding," such as the world can neither give nor take away. He has made "peace by the blood of his cross‡," for all that come unto God by him. Until they are in trouble and distress, until they feel the bitterness and fear the consequences of their sins, and see the impossibility of helping themselves, they will not apply to him; but whenever they do seek him thus "weary and heavy "laden," he hears their prayer. Their minds, for a season, are like the sea in a storm; they are distressed with guilt, fears, and temptations; but when he reveals his mighty name and boundless grace to their hearts, and says, "Peace, be still§," there is a great calm. "Being "justified by faith, they have peace with God through "our Lord Jesus Christ." He gives them peace likewise in a changing troublesome world, by inviting and enabling them to cast all their cares upon him, and to trust all their concerns in his hands, upon the assurance his word gives them, that he careth for them, and will manage and over-rule every thing for their good. In

* Isa. lvii. 21. † Phil. iv. 7.
‡ Col. i. 20. § Mark iv. 39.

proportion as their faith realizes his promises, they feel a composure and satisfaction. Knowing "that the "hairs of their head are numbered," that their afflictions, no less than their comforts, are tokens of his love, "that he will give them strength according to their day; "that he will be their guide and their guard even unto "death," they are not greatly moved by any events, or disturbed by apprehensions, because their hearts are fixed, trusting in the Lord*. Further, he teaches them, (what can only be learnt of him,) how to seek and maintain peace among men. His love subdues the power of self, and forms them to a spirit of philanthropy and benevolence, which has often such an effect, that they who dislike them for their attachment to him and to his precepts, and would willingly speak evil of them, are ashamed, and put to silence, by their perseverance in well-doing. Thus their peace increases as a river, which runs with a deeper and a broader stream as it approaches the ocean. For their peace is then strongest and most unshaken, when they draw near to death, and are upon the point of resigning their souls into his hands. This is the time, when, if not before, the false peace of the worldling, will give way to terror and dismay. "But mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, "for the end of that man is peace†." It must be allowed, that many of his people, through the power of temptation and remaining unbelief, have, at some seasons, uncomfortable fears concerning a dying hour; but when the time of their dismission actually arrives, we seldom see them afraid of the summons. There is a strength necessary to support the soul at the approach of death, which is usually withheld till the time of need. But

* Psal. cxii. 7. † Psal. xxxvii. 37.

then it is vouchsafed. They who have frequently access to the beds of dying believers, can bear testimony, as eye witnesses, to the faithfulness of their Lord. How often have we seen them triumphing in the prospect of immortality! as happy, in defiance of pain and sickness, as we can well conceive it possible to be while in the body, and as sure of heaven, as if they were already before the throne.

Such is the character of MESSIAH! This is the God whom we adore; our almighty unchangeable Friend! His greatness and goodness, his glory and his grace, when once known, fix the heart, no more to rove, and fill it with admiration, gratitude, and desire. From hence spring a cheerful, unreserved obedience to his commands, and a deliberate voluntary submission to his holy will. For his people do not serve him, or yield to him by constraint; at least, it is only the pleasing constraint of love, which makes their duty their delight; and their burden and grief is, that they can serve him no better.

May we be all thus minded. I dare not hope it is so with us all at present. But this is the day of his grace. For this cause he came into the world, that he might draw many hearts to himself*. And for this purpose he favours us with his Gospel, by which he still says, "Look "unto me, and be ye saved†;" "Come unto me, and I "will give you rest‡." To be found among his faithful followers, in the great day when he shall come to judge the world, is the one thing which, above all others, deserves our solicitude.

Hear then his voice to-day. Perhaps you are apprised of the necessity of a change of heart and life, at some future period, in order to die safely. Such a

* John xii. 32. † Isa. xlv. 22. ‡ Matt. xi. 28.

change is equally necessary, if you wish to live comfortably. While you are unfit to die, you can have no true enjoyment of life. It were easy to prove at large that procrastination is highly dangerous. Admitting, that, according to your present feelings, you really think yourself determined to seek the Lord at some future time, do you consider how many uncertainties you presume upon? Are you sure that you shall not be suddenly cut off, by an unexpected and unthought of stroke; or visited by a fever, which may quickly bring you into a state of delirium or stupefaction, and render your projected repentance impracticable? Yea, it will in any circumstances, be impracticable, unless God is pleased to influence your mind by his good Spirit. If you grieve this Spirit *now*, by resisting his operations, what reason have you to expect that he will *then* return? Do we not see many instances of what the poet, with great propriety, calls, "A slow sudden death?" How many people, while pining away under the power of incurable disease, amuse themselves with the hope of recovery to the last gasp; and though their acquaintance read death in their countenance for weeks or months, in defiance of such repeated and long-continued warnings, they die as suddenly, with respect to their own apprehensions, as if killed by lightning. Tremble lest such be your last end, if you trifle with God, who now calls you, by his Gospel, to seek him to-day, "while it is called to-day."

But I would lead you to consider your delay, not only as dangerous, but as unreasonable. Why are you afraid of being happy too soon? What strange and hard thoughts have you of God, if you suppose you can find more pleasure in living according to your own wills, than in obedience to his commands? Can the world give

you such peace and satisfaction as I have attempted to describe? Do you think a real persuasion that God is your friend, and that heaven will be your home, will spoil the relish of your earthly enjoyments, or make your lives uncomfortable? What hard thing does the Lord require of you, that you are so unwilling to comply? If we set aside, for a moment, the consideration of a future state and a final judgment, yet, even in a temporal view, you would be a great gainer, if your spirit and your conduct were regulated by the Gospel. What heart-breaking troubles, what losses, contests, pains of body, and remorse of conscience, would some of you have avoided, if you had believed and obeyed the word of God! What distresses may your headstrong passions soon plunge you into, if you presume to go on in your sins! For that the way of transgressors is hard, is not only declared in Scripture, but proved by the history and observation of every day. Forsake the foolish, therefore, and live. And, while the door of mercy is still open before you, pray to him who is able to bless you indeed, by delivering you from the guilt, and from the power of your iniquities; lest, if being "often reproved*," and still "hardening your hearts, you shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."

* Prov. xxix. 1.

SERMON X.

THE ANGEL'S MESSAGE AND SONG.

LUKE ii. 8—14.

There were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them; and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not; for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you: Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes laying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest; on earth peace, good-will toward men.

THE gratification of the *great*, the *wealthy*, and the *gay*, was chiefly consulted in the late exhibitions in Westminster-Abby. But, notwithstanding the expense of the preparations, and the splendid appearance of the auditory, I may take it for granted, that the shepherds who were honoured with the first information of the birth of MESSIAH, enjoyed, at free cost, a much more sublime and delightful entertainment. How poor and trivial is the most studied magnificence and brilliancy of an earthly court, compared with that effulgence of glory which surrounded the shepherds! The performers of this Oratorio, if I may be allowed the expression, were a multitude of the heavenly host. And though I do not suppose that the angel delivered his message in

the cadence which we call *Recitative*, I have no doubt but the chorus was a *song*, sweetly melodious as from blest voices. A song which the redeemed and the angels of the Lord are still singing before the throne. A new song*. A song which will be always new. We are made acquainted with the subject, yea, with the very words of this song. May our hearts be suitably affected by the consideration of them to-day! The melody and harmony of heaven are far above our conceptions. The music of that happy land has no dependence upon the vibrations of the air, or the admirable structure of the human ear. But we have reason to believe, there is, in the world of light and love, something analogous to what we call music, though different in kind, and vastly superior in effect, to any strains that can be produced by the most exquisite voices or instruments upon earth; as we readily judge the glory of an angel to be unspeakably more excellent, both in kind and degree, than any thing that is deemed glorious among mortals.

To consider this passage at large, would require many discourses. I shall confine myself at present to a few brief reflections on the circumstances of this heavenly vision, the message of the angel, and the concluding chorus or song.

I. The circumstances.

1. "Lo, an angel came upon them," &c. Suddenly when they had no expectation of such a visit, without any thing that might previously engage their attention, all at once, like a flash of lightning, a glory shone around them, and an angel appeared. We do not wonder that they were impressed with fear. We live near, perhaps

* Rev. v. 9.

in the midst of, an invisible world, full of great and wonderful realities, which yet, by too many persons, are considered and treated as non-entities, because they are not perceived by our bodily senses. But the Scripture assures us of the fact; and to reject this testimony, because it is not confirmed by our senses, is no less irrational and unphilosophical, than impious. A man born blind can have no more conception of light and colours, than we have of what passes in the world of spirits. And a nation of blind men, if there were such a nation, would probably treat a seeing person as a visionary madman, if he spoke to them of what he saw. But he would be sure of his own perceptions, though he could not satisfy the inquiries and cavils of the blind. Our senses are accommodated to our present state; but there may be a multitude of objects, as real in themselves, and as near to us as any that we behold with our eyes; of which we, for want of suitable faculties, can have no idea. To deny this, and to make our senses the criteria of the existence of things which are not within their reach, is exactly such an absurdity, as a blind man would be guilty of, who should deny the possibility of a rainbow, because he never heard it nor felt it. However, "Faith is the evidence of things "not seen." And they who believe the word of God, cannot doubt of the existence of an invisible state and invisible agents. The barrier between the inhabitants of that state and us, is too strong to be passed; for the will of the great Creator seems to be the barrier. Otherwise it is probable they could easily surprise us, since, upon special occasions, they have been permitted to discover themselves. We have a natural dread of such visitants, even though they should appear to us, as they did to the shepherds, as messengers of peace and mercy from

God. Yet we must shortly mingle with them. Death will introduce us into the world of spirits; and what we shall then meet with, what *beings* will be ready to accost us upon our first entrance into that unknown, unchangeable state, who can say? It deserves our serious thought. We are now encompassed by the objects of sense, but we must soon be separated from them all. We live in a crowd, but we must die alone. Happy are they, who, like Stephen, shall be able to commend their departing spirits into the hands of Jesus! He is Lord of all worlds, and has the keys of hades, of the invisible state.

2. The angel spoke. The Gospel was preached by an angel to Zacharias, to the virgin mother of MESSIAH, now to the shepherds; and, perhaps, to none but these. The angel, who appeard to Cornelius, said nothing to him of Jesus, but only directed him to send for Peter*. The glorious Gospel of the blessed God, with respect to its dignity, depth, and importance, may seem a fitter theme for the tongue of an angel than of a man; but angels never sinned; and though they might proclaim its excellency, they could not, from experience, speak of its efficacy. In this respect sinful worms are better qualified to preach to others, concerning him by whom they have, themselves, been healed and saved. Their weakness, likewise, is better suited to show that the influence and success of the Gospel is wholly owing to the power of God. It has, therefore, pleased God to "put this treasure into earthen vessels," and to commit the ministry of his word, not to angels, but to men. They whom he is pleased to employ in this office, however weak and unworthy in themselves, derive an ho-

* Acts x. 4, 5.

nour and importance from the message intrusted to them, and are, so far, worthy of the same attention as if an angel from heaven spoke. They are sinful men, and have reason to think humbly of themselves: nor should they, as the servants of a suffering, crucified Master, either wonder or complain, if they meet with unkindness from those whom they wish to serve; but they may "magnify their office*," and it is at the peril of their hearers to despise it. What the world accounts in us "the foolishness of preaching," is made to those who simply receive it, "the wisdom and power of "God." To others, even angels would preach in vain. They "who hear not Moses and the prophets," who submit not to the ordinary methods and means of grace which God has appointed, "would not be persuaded, "though one should rise from the dead."

3. The angel was sent with the most interesting news that could be made known to mankind; not to Cæsar, or to Herod, or to the high priests, but to obscure and lowly shepherds. "The Lord seeth not as man seeth:" the petty distinctions that obtain among men are not regarded by him. He is equally near to them that fear him in every situation of life; as the sun shines, as freely and fully, upon a cottage as upon a palace. These shepherds were, doubtless, of the number of the happy few, who in that time of degeneracy, were waiting and longing "for the consolation of Israel." The heads of the Jewish people found their consolation in their rank and wealth, and in the respect paid them by the vulgar. These things usually add to the idea of self-importance, and feed those tempers which are most displeasing to the Lord, and which indispose the mind to the recep-

* Rom. xi. 13.

tion of the Gospel, or to any due inquiry concerning it. And thus, in fact, from age to age, it has generally been "hidden from the wise and the great, and re-"vealed unto babes." The magi, or wise men, who lived in the east, where the knowledge of astronomy obtained, but where the Scripture was not known, were guided to MESSIAH by the appearance of a new star or meteor. The shepherds who were acquainted with the prophecies concerning MESSIAH, were informed of their accomplishment by an angel. Thus the Lord was pleased to suit the different manner of making known his will, to the previous situation of the persons.

II. The message of the angel, though concise, was comprehensive and full. It contained, The fact, "Unto "you is born this day;"—The place, "In the city of "David," that is, in Bethlehem, so called, because David likewise had been born there* ;—The office of MESSIAH, "A Saviour;"—His name, honour, and character, "Christ, or the Anointed; the Lord," the head and king of Israel, and of the Church, the Lord of all. I do but recite these particulars now, as they will repeatedly offer to our consideration in the series of subjects before me. The description of the state in which they would find him, was such as could only be reconciled to his titles and honours, by that simple faith which, without vain reasoning, acquiesces in the declarations of God. For how unlikely would it seem to a merely human judgment, that the Saviour of sinners, the promised MESSIAH, the Lord of all, should be "a "babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a "manger." Yet thus it was. "Though rich" in himself, "he became poor for our sakes†." On this ac-

* Luke ii. 4. † 2 Cor. viii. 9.

count, as the Scripture had foretold, "he was despised "and rejected of men." Though he came to his own, as a Lord or Master to his own house; yet, coming in this manner, his own professed servants, who pretended that they were longing and waiting for him, slighted and opposed him; preferred a notorious malefactor to him, and put him to death as an impostor and blasphemer. But the shepherds reasoned not through unbelief, and therefore they were not staggered; they obeyed the message, they went, they saw, they believed.

The seeming repugnance between the greatness of MESSIAH'S claims, and the state of humiliation in which he appeared when upon earth, was the great stumbling-block then, and continues to be so at this day. Because he stooped so low, and made himself of no reputation, too many still refuse to acknowledge his divine character. But they who are willing to be taught by the word and Spirit of God, see a beauty and propriety in his submitting to be born in a stable, and to live as a poor man, destitute of house or property.—Hereby he poured contempt upon worldly pomp and vanity, sanctified the state of poverty to his followers, and set them an encouraging example to endure it with cheerfulness. They, like the shepherds and his first disciples, are delivered from their natural prejudices, and are enabled "to behold his glory," through the vail of his outward humiliation, "as the glory of the only "begotten of the Father." And his condescension in "becoming poor for their sake, that they through his "poverty might be made rich," affects their hearts with admiration and gratitude.

But though too many, who are governed by the spirit and maxims of this world, are far from admiring his

love in assuming our nature under those circumstances, which, from his infancy to his death, exposed him to the contempt of his enemies, it is otherwise thought of in yonder world of light. For we read, that when the angel had declared to the shepherds the glad tidings, a multitude of the heavenly host expressed their joy by a song; which is the next subject that offers to our consideration.

III. Their highest praise was excited by a view of the effects which this unexampled love would produce.

1. "Glory to God in the highest." In the highest heaven, in the highest degree, for this highest instance of his mercy. At the creation these "morning stars "sung for joy*." But redemption was a greater work than they had yet seen, and a work by which his goodness, wisdom, and power, would be still more abundantly magnified. The glory of God, the exhibition of his adorable perfections, to the view of intelligent creatures, is the last and highest end of all his works. Nor would it be worthy of the infinite eternal God, in comparison with whose immensity the aggregate of all created good is no more than a point compared with the universe, or a single ray of light compared with the sun, to propose any thing short of his own glory, as the ultimate, final cause of his designs. And in proportion as any finite intelligences are conformed to the will of their Creator, and impressed with a sense of his preeminence, their highest end and aim will be the same with his. If, therefore, we compare the glory of God and the good of his creatures together, we may refer to them what our Lord was pleased to declare of the two great commandments. The former is incomparably the

* Job xxxviii. 7.

first and greatest of his ends; the second, in its proper place and subordination, is like unto it, and inseparably connected with it, or rather derived from it. The former is, if I may so speak, the essential difference of the divine operations; the latter, so far as consistent with it, is the result of a glorious and efficacious property of his consummate excellence. In the redemption of fallen man, both are displayed to the highest advantage. "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth "peace, good-will toward men."

The glory of his *goodness;* this shines bright in the capacities and happiness he has communicated to angels; but it shines with greater brightness in the mercy afforded to mankind; whether we consider the objects, who are sinners, rebels, and enemies; or his purpose in their favour, not only to restore the life they had forfeited, but to bestow "it more abundantly*," with respect to title, security, and honour; or, lastly and principally, the mean by which their deliverance from everlasting misery, and their possession of everlasting happiness, is procured; and which could only be procured by the humiliation and death of the Son of his love.

The glory of his *wisdom*, in adjusting the demands of his holiness, justice, and truth, with the purposes of his mercy: in providing such a method for the exercise of his mercy, as renders his displeasure against sin more conspicuous by pardoning, than by punishing it: in abasing the sinner's pride, by the very considerations which inspire his hope and confidence; so that, while he confesses himself unworthy of the very air that he breathes, he is encouraged and warranted to claim a

* John x. 10.

participation in all the blessings of grace and glory: and finally, in proposing motives which, when rightly understood, are always found sufficient to influence the heart, even though it has been habitually hardened in sin, long deaf to the voice of reason, conscience, and interest, and equally unaffected by the judgments or the mercies of God, till enlightened to perceive the excellency of the Gospel.

The glory of his *power*, in making all the acts of free agents, through a long succession of ages, subservient to this great purpose, not excepting those who most laboured to obstruct it; in changing the disposition of the sinner, however obstinate; and in carrying on his work of grace, when once begun, in such feeble inconsistent creatures as men are, in defiance of all difficulties and opposition arising from within or without.

These are subjects which "the angels desire to look "into*," which fill the most exalted intelligences with admiration. The glory of God was manifested, was celebrated in the highest heavens, when MESSIAH was born of a woman.

2. The great design and effect of his appearance, with regard to mankind, is peace. "On earth peace." Man, as a fallen creature, is in a state of war and rebellion against his Maker. He has renounced his allegiance and dependence, is become his own end. He is now against God, disobedient to his laws, and disaffected to his government. And his conscience, if not stupified and cauterized by frequent resistance of conviction, suggests that God is against him. He feels he is not happy here; he fears he shall be miserable here-

* 1 Pet. i. 12.

after. This apprehension strengthens his aversion from God. And, indeed, without an express assurance from the Lord himself, whom he has offended, that there is forgiveness with him, he would not only fear, but sink into despair, if he rightly understood the horrid enormity of a state of alienation from the blessed God. But infinite wisdom and mercy have provided and propounded a method by which the honour of the divine perfections and government is secured, and pardon and peace vouchsafed to rebels. "God was in Christ re-"conciling the world unto himself." The knowledge of this mercy, when revealed to the sinner's heart, subdues his enmity, constrains him to throw down his arms, and to make an unreserved submission and surrender of himself; forms him to a temper of love and confidence, and disposes him to habitual and cheerful obedience. Now "mercy and truth are met together, "righteousness and peace have kissed each other*;" and God is glorified in the highest, for peace proclaimed upon the earth.

The expression of "good-will toward men," seems to rise upon the former. Not only peace, but acceptance and adoption in the Beloved. Sinners who believe in the Son of God, are not merely delivered from the condemnation they deserved, but are united to their Saviour; considered as one with him, his children, the members of his body, and made partakers of his life and his glory. God is their portion, and heaven is their home. The Lord's satisfaction in this, as the greatest of all his works, is expressed by the prophet in such astonishing terms of condescension, as surpass our utmost conceptions; and we can only say, "Lord,

* Psal. lxxxv. 10.

"what is man, that thou art thus mindful of him!" We believe, admire, and adore. "The Lord thy God in "the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will "rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, "he will rejoice over thee with singing*."

Assuredly this song of the heavenly host is not the language of our hearts by nature. We once sought our pleasure and happiness in a very different way. We were indifferent to the glory of God, and strangers to his peace. And some of us are still blind to the excellencies of the Gospel, and deaf to its gracious invitations. But we must not expect to sing with the great company of the redeemed hereafter, before the throne of glory, unless we learn and love their song while we are here†. They who attain to the inheritance of the saints in light, are first made meet for it in the present life, and in this way. They believe the testimony of the Scripture respecting their own guilt, unworthiness, and helplessness; then they receive the record which God has given of his Son. They renounce "all confi- "dence in the flesh‡;" they rejoice in Christ Jesus, and from his fulness they derive grace to worship God in the spirit. A sense of their obligations to the Saviour, disposes them to praise him now as they *can*; and they rejoice in hope of seeing him ere long as he is, and that then they shall praise him as they *ought*. For heaven itself, as described in the word of God, could not be a state of happiness to us, unless we are like-minded with the apostle, to "account all things loss "and dung for the excellency of the knowledge of "Christ Jesus our Lord."

* Zeph. iii. 17. † Rev. xiv. 3. ‡ Phil. iii. 3.

SERMON XI.

MESSIAH'S ENTRANCE INTO JERUSALEM.

ZECH. ix. 9, 10.

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.—And he shall speak peace unto the heathen.

THE narrowness and littleness of the mind of fallen man, are sufficiently conspicuous in the idea he forms of magnificence and grandeur. The pageantry and parade of a Roman triumph, or of an eastern monarch, as described in history, exhibit him to us in what he himself accounts his best estate. If you suppose him seated in an imperial carriage, arrayed in splendid apparel, wearing a crown or tiara ornamented with jewels, preceded and followed by a long train of guards and attendants, surrounded by the unmeaning acclamations of ignorant multitudes, you see the poor worm at the summit of his happiness. He has no conception of any thing greater than this. And the spectators are generally of the same mind. They admire, they envy, his lot; and there is hardly a person in the crowds around him, but would be very glad to take his place, were it practicable. Yet this great little creature would surely be mortified, if, in the height of his self-complacence, he could consider, that he had the very same regard for a pre-eminence in finery, the same desire to be admired and envied, and

[illegible] kind of satisfaction in distinction abov
[illegible] when he was a child of ten years old. H
[illegible] a child still, only he has changed his p
[illegible] and now acts upon a larger scale, but with
[illegible] and contracted views.

How different was MESSIAH'S entry into Jerus
foretold in this prophecy, the accomplishment of w
we read in the evangelists! And how differently wa
affected by the objects around him! He poured conte
upon the phantom of human glory. This "Kin
"kings and Lord of lords, was meek and lowly, ri
"upon an ass's colt*." And though a secret divine
fluence constrained the multitude to acknowledge
character, and, with some accommodation to the
toms of the times, "to strew their garments in the w
as they proclaimed the King who came in the nam
Jehovah; yet he appeared unmoved by their appla
Had the history of Jesus, like those which we hav
Socrates or Cyrus, been merely the work of a hu
writer, ambitious to adorn a favourite character with
most splendid qualities of a philosopher or a hero,
should never have known how his mind was engage
this situation. The Saviour must be divine, his hi
rian must be inspired, the fact must be true; for
could not have invented such a circumstance, that
meek and lowly Saviour took no notice of the zeal
homage of his friends, because his heart was filled
compassion for his enemies, who were thirsting for
blood. For it was then, amidst the acclamation of
disciples, that he beheld the city and wept over it, w
he foretold the evils which the rejection of him wo

* Luke xix. 35—38.

bring upon it. "Oh that thou hadst known, even thou, "at least in this thy day, the things belonging to thy "peace! But now they are hidden from thine eyes."

An angel proclaimed his birth to the shepherds; and wise men from the east paid such attention to the new-born Saviour, that the jealousy of Herod was excited, and attempts made to destroy him. But this wonderful infant was brought up in a state of obscurity, in a place of no repute, and known by no higher description than that of "The carpenter's son." In the course of his ministry he appeared and was treated as a poor man, he had no certain dwelling-place, he submitted to receive supplies, for his support, from the contributions of a few of his followers, for the most of them were poor like himself. And though he wrought many wonderful works for the relief of the necessitous and miserable, he admitted no alteration in his own external state, but was content to be poor and despised, for our sakes, to the end of his life. I think the only occasion on which he permitted a public acknowledgment of his person and character, was when he fulfilled this prophecy. And still he was the same meek and lowly Saviour. As his kingdom was not of this world, neither were there any marks of human grandeur in his procession. He approached Jerusalem, attended, indeed, by a concourse of people, but riding upon an ass, and weeping for his enemies.

The passage of the *Messiah* which follows the chorus of the heavenly host, is taken from these verses. It does not include the whole of them. In one clause there is a small alteration in the expression, but it does not affect the sense. Instead of, "He is just having salvation," it is, "He is a righteous Saviour."

We may notice,

I. The prophet's address. "To the daughter of "Zion and Jerusalem."

II. The exhortation to joy. "Rejoice and shout."

III. The cause assigned for this joy. "Thy King "cometh."

IV. The characters of the King. "A righteous Sa- "viour."

V. His great design. "To speak peace to the Hea- "then."

I. "Zion" and "Jerusalem" are indifferently used as emblems of the church, or professing people of God. When they occur together, as here, contradistinguished from each other, Zion, the city of David, the seat of government, and of the temple-worship, may denote the principal persons of the ecclesiastical and civil state; and Jerusalem may be expressive of the people at large, the daughters of a place signifying, according to the Hebrew idiom, the inhabitants. They boasted that they were the Lord's peculiar people: they had the prophecies and promises concerning MESSIAH in their hands, and were professedly expecting and waiting for his appearance. They are therefore called upon to rejoice in it. But when he actually came, though "he came to "his own," to his own nation, city, and temple; his own people, to whose affection and allegiance he had the justest claim, "received him not*." But there were a few who truly waited for him, as the hope and consolation of Israel, at the time of his birth; and many more were afterwards convinced by his gracious words and works, that "he only had the words of eternal "life," and became his followers. By their acknowledged principles, they were all bound to acknowledge

* John i. 11.

that prophet whom Moses had foretold, "God would "raise up among them like unto himself*;" that is, to be, as he had been, a lawgiver, to institute a new dispensation of the true religion; and their refusal involved them, as a nation, in the punishment which Moses had likewise denounced against those who should refuse to hearken to him. Thus their peculiar advantage in possessing a divine revelation, while the rest of mankind were left ignorant of the will of God, proved an aggravation of their guilt, and rendered their obstinacy more inexcusable, and their condemnation more severe. I am bound to take every opportunity of noticing the striking parallel in this respect, between the Jewish nation in our Saviour's time, and the nations, who, since that period, have admitted the New Testament as a revelation from God. By assuming the Christian name, and so far calling the Saviour Lord, while they reject the spirit and design of the Gospel, and treat the ministers of it with neglect or contempt, they tread in the steps, and share in the guilt, of those who pretended to expect MESSIAH, and yet crucified him when he appeared among them. In person he could be crucified but once; but the Scripture speaks of those who "crucify the Son "of God afresh, and put him to open shame." How far this is the case of the persons who can bear to hear of his passion and his kingdom when made the subject of a musical entertainment, but upon no other occasion, deserves their serious consideration.

II. The exhortation can only be complied with by those who are sensible of their need of a Saviour, and his authority and ability to save. To these the prophet brings a joyful message, and they will "rejoice and

* Deut. xviii. 15—19. Acts vii. 37.

"shout." The joy of harvest*, and of the victors in war when dividing the spoil of the vanquished, is celebrated with shouting. But sinners, who, by the knowledge of MESSIAH, are delivered from going down into the pit, from the dominion of the powers of darkness, and are translated into the kingdom of God, experience a joy far superior, in kind and degree, to any satisfaction that temporal things can afford. It is "a joy unspeak-"able and full of glory†." Jesus, when known and received by faith, is, in the highest sense, light to those who sat in darkness, health to the sick, food to the hungry, and rest to the weary soul. Thus many rejoiced in his goodness when he was upon earth; and he still has a people, and will have to the end of time, who do and shall rejoice in him upon these accounts, though every spring of temporal joy should be dried up. They who know his name, and put their trust in him, are warranted to appropriate those strong expressions of another prophet, "Although the fig-tree shall not blossom, nei-"ther shall fruit be in the vine, the labour of the olive "shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat, the flock "shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no "herd in the stalls: yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I "will joy in the God of my salvation‡."

III. The ground and cause of this joy is assigned. "The King cometh." MESSIAH is a king. This title he avowed to pilate‖, by whose order it was fixed over him upon his cross. That this was not a slight and arbitrary circumstance, but providential and important, we may, I think, infer from the care taken by the evangelists to preserve the remembrance of it, for it is re-

* Isa. ix. 3. † 1 Pet. i. 8.
‡ Hab. iii. 17, 18. ‖ Mark xv. 2.

corded by them all. He is, indeed, King of kings, King and Lord of nations, King of worlds; but he is here spoken of as King of Zion. The kingdom he came to establish upon earth is not of this world, nor like the kingdoms of the world. The maxims, language, interests, and aims of it, are peculiar to itself. His power and providence rule over all; but he is only known, admired, and willingly obeyed by the subjects of his spiritual kingdom, who, though they are *in* the world, are not *of* it, but "strangers and pilgrims upon earth." Their* πολιτευμα, their true citizenship, is in heaven. These are his peculiar people. And though they partake with others in the changes and trials incident to this mortal life, and have their several departments and duties assigned them according to his will, as members of society, and it does not yet appear what they shall be†; they are even now the children and servants of the Lord, and he manifests himself to them as he does not to others. Happy are these his subjects who dwell under his shadow. He rules them, not with that rod of iron by which he bruises and breaks the power of his enemies, but with his golden sceptre of love. He reigns by his own right, and by their full and free consent, in their hearts. He reigns upon a throne of grace, to which they have at all times access; and from whence they receive, in answer to their prayers, mercy and peace, the pardon of all their sins, grace to help in every time of need, and a renewed supply answerable to all their wants, cares, services, and conflicts. So that, though they are surrounded with snares, and fiercely opposed by many enemies, they cannot be overpowered, for the Lord himself is their King and their Saviour. We have,

* Phil. iii. 20. † 1 John iii. 2.

IV. Two characters of this King. "He is just, having salvation," (or, as it is in the passage of the *Messiah*, "He is a righteous Saviour.")

1. "He is righteous." His kingdom is founded in righteousness. It is the effect and reward of his obedience unto death, by which he made an end of sin, and brought in an everlasting righteousness. As his people receive and expect all from his hand, so likewise for his sake. Such is his command, and such is his promise. "If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it*. In pleading their cause, and managing their concerns, he is their righteous advocate. And therefore, because his intercession is founded upon a righteous stipulation, which he has completely fulfilled, he does not say, "Father," I ask, but, "I will, that those whom thou hast "given me, be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory†."

2. He is a "Saviour;" having salvation in himself; yea, "He is their salvation‡." His wisdom, power, compassion, and determined purpose, are all engaged to save them fully, freely, and for ever; to save them from guilt, from Satan, and from sin, through all the dangers and trials of this life; to save them to the uttermost, till he fixes them finally out of the reach of all evil, and puts them in possession of all the happiness of which their natures are capable, in a conformity to his own image, and the enjoyment of unclouded, uninterrupted communion with God.

V. His great design was not confined to Israel after the flesh. "He shall speak peace to the heathen" also. His kingdom comprises, besides the believing posterity of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, a great multitude gathered

* John xiv. 14. † John xvii. 24. ‡ Isa. xii. 2.

from amidst all nations, people, and languages, "from "the east and the west, from the north and the south*." Though the Heathen were universally alienated from God, by evil works and an evil conscience, he has undertaken to reconcile them, and to bring those near who were once afar off. By their knowledge of him, their prisons shall be opened, their chains broken†, their condemnation reversed, and they shall be renewed, and accepted in the Beloved, as the true children of Abraham. He shall likewise conciliate peace between Jew and Gentile, make of both one people‡, pulling down the walls of separation and prejudice, that with one heart and mind they may love, serve, and praise him. For where faith in him obtains, all distinctions are lost and superseded. "There is," then, "neither Greek "nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, "Scythian, bond nor free; but Christ is all, and "in all§."

Much has been already done by the Gospel. Multitudes have been turned from darkness to light, and from the worship of dumb idols to serve the living and true God. And we expect a time when this promise will be more extensively and literally fulfilled; when the kingdom shall be the Lord's to the end of the earth; when the fulness of the Gentiles shall come in, all Israel be saved, and the nations shall learn war no more.

From these characters of the Saviour, we may collect the character of his people. For they, beholding his glory, are changed, (according to the measure of their faith,) into the same image. The incommunicable per-

* Luke xiii. 28, 29. † Isa. xlv. 14.
‡ Eph. ii. 13—16. § Col. iii. 11.

fections of God, such as his sovereignty and all-sufficiency, can only produce in his people correspondent impressions of reverence, submission, and dependence; an attempt to be like him in these respects would be highly impious, and was indeed the original source of our apostasy from him. Man, by indulging a desire of being like God, rebelled against him, aspired at independence, and preferred the gratification of his own will to the righteous and equitable commands of his Maker. The unavoidable consequence of this madness is misery. It is not possible that he should be happy, till he be reduced to his proper state of subordination. But that light of the glory of God in the person of Jesus Christ, which is revealed to the renewed heart by the Gospel, has a transforming effect upon those who receive it; they are made partakers of a divine nature, and resemble him, whose they are, and whom they serve, "in righteousness, goodness, and "truth*."

They are righteous as he is righteous. I speak not of their relative state, as they are accepted and accounted righteous in the Beloved, but of their real character. They learn of him to "love righteousness and "hate iniquity†." Their principles are right, drawn from the revealed truths of God. They comport themselves as becomes weak and unworthy sinners, and ascribe the glory of their salvation to the Lord alone; and therefore the general tenour of their conduct is governed by the righteous rules of his precepts; of which they have the most endearing and animating exemplification in the conduct of their Saviour; from him they learn to frame their tempers, desires, and hopes, and

* Eph. v. 9. † Psal. xlv. 7.

thus give evidence that they are, in deed and in truth, a saved people. His love, in proportion as it is realized in their hearts by faith, teaches them likewise to love one another, and to exercise benevolence to all men. When they understand the true nature of his spiritual kingdom, which consisteth not in external distinctions and forms, "but in righteousness, peace, and "joy in the Holy Ghost*;" and that it is his great design to form to himself a people from amongst the nations of the earth, who shall be one body, enlivened by one and the same spirit, they acquire a large and comprehensive mind. They rise above the influence of names, parties, and divisions; are freed from the narrow views and interests of self; and "put on, as the "elect of God, bowels of mercies, kindness, humility, "meekness, long-suffering, forbearance, and forgive-"ness†," in conformity to the pattern and will of their great Exemplar. Thus he speaks peace to them, and hushes all their angry, tumultuous passions into a calm.

Such is the spirit and tendency of the Gospel. Let us try ourselves by this touchstone, measure ourselves by this rule, and weigh ourselves in these balances of the sanctuary. They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh, have put off the old man, and are renewed in the spirit of their minds. If he be indeed your King, your consciences will bear you witness that you revere, imitate, and obey him. If he be your Saviour, you certainly must be sensible yourself, and others must observe, that you are different from what you once were.

And if any of you should be convinced, that hitherto you have been a Christian only in name and in form,

* Rom. xiv. 17. † Col. iii. 12.

but destitute of that which constitutes the life and power of real godliness, this will be a good beginning. For though it be high time that you should in good earnest attend to these things, blessed be God, it is not yet too late. He is a righteous and a gracious Saviour; seek him as such, and he will speak peace to you also. His sure promise is recorded for your encouragement, "Him that cometh unto me I will in nowise cast "out*."

SERMON XII.

EFFECTS OF MESSIAH'S APPEARANCE.

ISAIAH XXXV. 5, 6.

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of th deaf shall be unstopped: Then shall the lame man leap a an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing.

HOW beautiful and magnificent is the imagery, which the prophet, in this chapter, represents the eff of MESSIAH'S appearance! The scene, propose our view, is a barren and desolate wilderness. when he, who in the beginning said, "Let ther "light, and there was light," condescends to visit wilderness, the face of nature is suddenly change his presence. Fountains and streams of water b forth in the burning desert, the soil becomes fruit clothed with verdure, and adorned with flowers. The towering cedars, which were the glory of Lebanon, and

* John vi. 37.

the richest pastures, which were the excellency of Carmel, present themselves to the eye, where a little before, all was uncomfortable and dreary. How is it that so few of those who value themselves upon their taste, and who profess to be admirers of pastoral poetry in particular, are struck with the elegance and beauty of his description? Alas, we can only ascribe their indifference to the depravity of the human heart. They would, surely, have admired this picture, could they have met with it in any of their favourite authors; but descriptive paintings in this style, so exquisitely combining grandeur with simplicity, are only to be found n the Bible, a book which their unhappy prejudices and passions too often lead them to depreciate and neglect. But they who have a scriptural and spiritual taste, not only admire this passage as a description of a pleasing change in outward nature, but consider it as a just and expressive representation of a more important, a moral change, of which they have themselves been, in a measure, the happy subjects. The barren wilderness reminds them of the state of mankind by the fall, and of their own hearts before MESSIAH, the Sun of Righteousness, arose upon them with healing, with light, power, and comfort in his beams. In that memorable hour, old things passed away, and all things became new. The Lord, by shining into their hearts, and showing them his glory in the person of Christ, has created for them a new heaven and a new earth. The works of God around them in his creation and providence assume a different appearance. Before, they lived without him in the world; but now, they see his hand wherever they look, they hear his voice in every event; for now the principles of his grace are planted in their souls, and they are no longer barren

nor unfruitful, but are "filled with the fruits of righ-
"teousness, which are by Jesus Christ to his praise*."

The verses which I have read exhibit the effects of MESSIAH's power and goodness, by another image eqally pleasing. Not only the wilderness, but the inhabitants of the wilderness, partake of the virtue of the great Redeemer. He finds them in circumstances of distress, which he only can relieve. But when he comes, the blind receive their sight, the deaf hear, the lame walk, and the dumb have voices given them to resound his praise. These mighty works, in their literal sense, marked his character, and confirmed his claims, when he was upon earth; and to these he himself appealed, in proof of his being the promised Saviour whom the prophets had foretold, and that no other was to be expected†.

But the words have a still more sublime and important sense. As the great Physician, he cured all manner of bodily diseases and infirmities. But this was not the principal design for which he came into the world. The maladies to which sin has subjected the body, are but emblems of the more dreadful evils which it has brought upon the soul. He came to open the eyes of the mind; to make the obstinate will attentive and obedient to the voice of God; to invigorate our benumbed and paralytic faculties, that we may be active and cheerful in his service; and to open our lips that our mouths may show forth his praise. I have a good hope that I may warrantably say, "This day is this "Scripture fulfilled in your ears‡." Some of you who were once darkness, are now light in the Lord.

These different effects are produced by one simple,

* Phil. i. 11. † Matth. xi. 3—6. ‡ Luke iv. 21.

but powerful operation. While Lazarus lay in the grave, all his natural powers were inactive. But when the voice of the Son of God restored him to life*, he was, of course, immediately enabled to see, to hear, to move, and to speak. Thus while we were spiritually dead, we were necessarily blind, deaf, dumb, and motionless, with respect to all the objects and faculties of that life of God in the soul, which is the perfection and honour of our nature. When we are made partakers of this life, by a new and heavenly birth, then our spiritual senses are brought into exercise; then the eyes of the blind are opened, to see the beauty and glory of divine truths; we hear the voice of God, we feel a liberty to walk and act in his service, and our tongues are taught to praise him. Here are four chief effects of a work of grace upon the heart, which distinguish believers from the rest of mankind.

And these effects are all to be ascribed to MESSIAH. For they are all wrought by the agency of his Holy Spirit. The gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit, which are absolutely necessary, as well for the perpetuating of his Gospel from age to age, as for making it efficacious and successful, are bestowed upon sinners wholly upon the account of his mediation. It was when "he as "cended on high and led captivity captive†," that he procured these blessings for "rebellious men, that the "Lord God might dwell among them." And it was only for his sake, and on the account of what he was to accomplish in the fulness of time, as intimated in the promise of the seed of the woman appointed to bruise the serpent's head, that there were any gracious communications afforded to fallen man, from the first en-

* John xi. 43. † Psal. lxviii. 18.

trance of sin into the world. But now the Redeemer's great work is fulfilled, his salvation is more openly revealed and applied, by the publication of the Gospel, with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, and sinners hear the voice of God and live. Then all the changes prefigured and predicted in my text take place, and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field.

1. They were once blind, but now they *see*. The religion of true believers is not the effect of imagination and blind impulse, but is derived from a solid knowledge which will bear the strictest scrutiny, and is the reasonable service of an enlightened understanding. They see God, their apprehensions of him are, in some measure, answerable to his greatness and his goodness, and inspire them with reverence and love. Their conceptions of other things in which they are most nearly interested, are agreeable to the truth. Sin appears to them hateful in itself, as well as mischievous in its consequences; and holiness, not only necessary by the ordination of God, but desirable for its own sake, as essentially belonging to the true dignity and happiness of man. They know themselves; they see and feel that they are such creatures as the Bible describes them to be, weak, depraved, and vile. Of course, they see the folly of attempting to recommend themselves to God, and can no longer place any dependence on what they once accounted their wisdom, power, or righteousness; and therefore they see the absolute necessity of a Saviour. They see, likewise, and approve the method of salvation proposed by the Gospel, as worthy of the wisdom and justice of God, and every way adapted to the exigences of their sins, wants, and fears. They see and admire the excellence, dignity, and sufficiency of him, on whom their help is laid. His power and authority

engage their confidence, his love captivates and fixes their hearts. They see the vanity of the present state, and the vast importance of eternity. In these respects they have all of them a good understanding, however inferior in natural capacity, or acquired knowledge, to the wise men of the world.

2. Their knowledge, so far as they have attained, is not merely speculative, cold, and indistinct, like the light of the moon. The Sun of Righteousness has shined into their hearts. The light they enjoy is vital, cheering, and effective. Because they thus see, they *hear* likewise. They were once deaf to the voice of God, whether he spoke by his word or his providence; whether in the language of mercy or judgment. But now their deaf ears are unstopped. They are now attentive, submissive, and willing to receive his instructions, and to obey his commands. With them, one "Thus saith the Lord," has the force of a thousand arguments. They desire no further proof of a doctrine, no other warrant for their practice, no other reason for any dispensation, than Thus the Lord has said, This he requires, and This is his appointment. Thus their wills are brought into subjection; and they so understand, as to believe and obey.

3. Further, with their sight and hearing they receive power and activity. Once, they were tied and bound in the chain of their sins, or, like a man benumbed with a dead palsy, unable to move. If they sometimes seemed to express desires that might be called *good* with respect to their object, they were faint and ineffectual. But now their fetters are broken, the health and strength of their souls are restored, and God has wrought in them not only to "will," but also to "do

"according to his good pleasure*." It is not more wonderful that a cripple should suddenly recover the use of his limbs, than that a person, who has long been fettered in sinful habits, should be enabled to move and act with alacrity in the service of God. But in the day of divine power, sinners are made both willing and able. How burdensome was that which they once accounted their religion! how little comfort did it yield them! how little did it assist them against their passions, or against their fears? But all things are become new, since they have attained to a life of faith in the Son of God. Their religious service is now pleasant, and their warfare against sin and the world, victorious. Their obligations, motives, resources, encouragements, and prospects, inspire them with a holy vigour, to run, with patience and perseverance, the race that is set before them.

4. Having their sight and hearing thus restored, and their hearts enlarged to walk at liberty in the ways of wisdom; they are no longer dumb, silent, and sullen, but out of the abundance of their hearts, their mouths speak the language of gratitude, praise, and joy. For though most people have the faculty of speech, and can use, or rather abuse, their tongues fluently; though we are sufficiently expert from our childhood, in the dialects of falsehood, profaneness, and folly; yet, by nature, we are dumb with respect to the language that becomes us, as the creatures of God, and as those who have sinned against him, and yet are invited to seek his mercy. But when grace teaches the heart, then the heart teaches the mouth†. When we believe, then we

* Phil. ii. 13. † Prov. xvi. 23.

speak, yea, we sing and greatly rejoice; as it is written, "In that day I will praise thee; though thou wast "angry, thine anger is turned away*." And again, "The voice of joy and thanksgiving is in the taber- "nacles of the righteous†." "Let the redeemed of the "Lord say, that he is good, and his mercy endureth "for ever‡."

It is of great importance to examine ourselves by this test, and not to be satisfied with our knowledge of the Gospel, any further than our consciences bear us witness, that it has produced a real, moral change in our tempers, conduct, and pursuits. For there is a knowledge, which is falsely so called. It puffeth up, but edifieth not. Our Lord's declaration deserves our most serious attention: "For judgment I am come into "this world; that they which see not, may see; and "that they which see, might be made blind§." It is very possible, yea, very easy, by the help of books, sermons, and converse, to acquire an orderly and systematic knowledge of divine truths; it may be learnt thus, like any other branch of human science, and the head be well stored with orthodox sentiments; and there may be an ability to prove and defend them, in a way of argumentation, while the heart is utterly a stranger to their salutary influence. Such characters are too common. None make a greater parade and boast of seeing, than these persons. None are more fatally blinded. They smile, with disdain, when they speak of a self-righteousness founded upon prayers, alms-deeds, and sacraments, but are not aware that they themselves live in the very spirit of the Pharisees||,

* Isa. xii. 1. † Psal. cxviii. 15. ‡ Psal. cvii. 1, 2.
§ 1 John ix. 39. || Luke xviii. 11, 12.

so clearly described, and so expressly condemned, in the New Testament. Their supposed knowledge of the doctrines which they misunderstand and abuse, is the righteousness on which they build their hopes; and trusting to this, they despise all those who are stricter in practice than themselves, as ignorant and legal; and discover almost as great dislike to close and faithful preaching, as they could do to poison. Though the doctrines of the Gospel, when rightly received, are productive of Godliness, it is to be feared, there are people who espouse and plead for them, to quiet their consciences, by furnishing them with excuses for the sins they are unwilling to forsake. It is not surprising, that they who are displeased with the yoke of our Lord's precepts, should seem friendly to the idea of salvation without the works of the law. The notion of the final perseverance of believers, may afford a pillow for those to rest on, who, being at present destitute of all feeling of spiritual life, labour to persuade themselves that they are Christians, because they had some serious thoughts, and made some profession of the truth, many years ago. So, likewise, in what the Scriptures teach, of the total inability of fallen man, they think they have a plea to justify their negligence and sloth, and therefore are not disposed to contradict the testimony. The invitation and command to wait, and watch, and strive, in the ways and means of the Lord's appointment, they evade, as they think, with impunity, by confessing the charge, and saying, I am a poor creature indeed, I can do nothing of myself aright, and therefore to what purpose should I attempt to do any thing? A minister may preach upon these points, in general terms, and obtain their good word. But if he speaks plainly and faithfully to conscience; if he bears testimony not only

against dead works, but against a dead faith; against spiritual pride, evil tempers, evil speaking, love of the world, and sinful compliances; if he insists that the branches of the true vine should bear grapes, and not the same fruit as the bramble; hearers of this stamp will think they do God service by censuring all he can say, as low and legal trash. How awful! that people should be blinded by the very truths which they profess to believe! Yet I fear such cases are too frequent. God grant a delusion of this kind may never be found amongst us! "For if the salt" itself "should lose its "savour, wherewith shall it be salted*?" May we come simply to the light, with a desire of seeing more of ourselves, and more of our Saviour; that we may be more humble and spiritual, more afraid of sin, more watchful and successful in striving against it? and, in our whole conversation, more conformable to our glorious Head!

But to return. From what has been offered upon this subject, we may observe,

1. That true Christianity is friendly to society, and to the common interests of mankind. It is the source of peace, tenderness, benevolence, and every humane temper. It is calculated to sooth the fierce disposition, to enlarge the selfish spirit, and to transform the lion into the lamb. What then must we think of those pretended friends to liberty and free inquiry, whose unhappy zeal is employed to rob us of the only light and balm of life? who, by their misrepresentations and cavils, endeavour to persuade others, though they cannot effectually persuade themselves, that the Gospel, a scheme so wise in its constitution, so salutary in its

* Matth. v. 13.

design, so powerful in its effects, is no better than an imposition, the contrivance of superstitious or artful men! Why should they attempt to take away the foundation of our hope, and the spring of our comfort, (if they were able,) when they know they have nothing to substitute in their place! Let us think of them with that compassion which their state calls for; and pray for them, "if peradventure God will give them re-"pentance to the acknowledgment of the truth*."

2. The change thus wrought is great, marvellous, and, if not so frequent, might be styled miraculous. It is more than education, example, persuasion, or resolution can perform. It is the work of God alone, to open the blind eyes, to change the heart of stone into flesh, and to raise the dead.

This thought should exclude boasting. The happy subjects of this change were no better by nature or practice than others. They have nothing but what they have received. The glory and praise is due to the Lord alone. It should likewise soften their censure of those who are still in a state of alienation from God, or at least prevent the emotions of anger and resentment towards them. They know not what they do. Their danger should excite our pity, and our friendly endeavours to recover them from the error of their way. And especially, we should be careful, so to regulate our behaviour, "that if they obey not the word, they may "without the word be convinced and won†," by the force of our example. If the Lord be pleased to do that for them which he has done for us, their dislike of us, and their opposition to us, will be quickly at an end; and though they set out after us, they may possibly

* 2 Tim. ii. 25. † 1 Pet. iii. 1.

make a swifter progress in the Christian life than we have done. Thus, though Saul of Tarsus approached Damascus, as an enemy and a persecutor, when the scales fell from his eyes, he not only immediately joined the disciples, but in a little time became a pattern to them.

That the change is the work of God, should likewise be considered by those, who, from a sense of the greatness of their sins, and the strength of their sinful habits, are ready to sink into despair. Whatever apparent difficulty there may be in your case, it is easy to divine power. "All things are possible with God*," and "all "things," likewise, "are possible to him that be- "lieveth†." The promises invite you to apply to him who is the Author and Finisher of faith, and who has said for your encouragement, "Him that cometh unto "me, I will in nowise cast out."

SERMON XIII.

THE GREAT SHEPHERD.

ISAIAH xl. 11.

He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom; and shall gently lead those that are with young.

IT is not easy for those whose habits of life are insensibly formed by the customs, of modern times, to conceive any adequate idea of the pastoral life, as it obtained

* Mark x. 27. † Mark ix. 23.

in the eastern countries, before that simplicity of manners, which characterized the early ages, was corrupted by the artificial and false refinements of luxury. Wealth, in those days, consisted principally in flocks and herds; and Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and others, who were, to speak in modern language, persons of high distinction, were likewise shepherds. The book of Genesis, which is an authentic and infallible history of the most ancient times, exhibits a manner of living so different from our own, that, perhaps, few persons are qualified to enter fully into the spirit of the description. The poets seem to have derived the idea of the golden age from some imperfect tradition of this primitive state; and if we compare it with the state of things around us, methinks we have reason to say, "How is the gold become dim, and "the fine gold changed*!" The opulence of Jacob may be conjectured from the present he sent to his brother Esau †. Yet Jacob attended his flocks himself "in the "drought by day, and in the frost by night‡." The vigilance, the providence, the tenderness, necessary to the due discharge of the shepherd's office, have been frequently applied in describing the nature and ends of government; and it has been esteemed a high encomium of a good king, to style him The shepherd of his people. This character MESSIAH, the Saviour, condescends to bear; and happy are they, who, with a pleasing consciousness, can say, "We are his people, and the sheep "of his pasture§."

The passage will lead me to speak of the Shepherd, the flock, and his care and tenderness over them.

I. Our Lord expressly styles himself the "Shepherd,"

* Lam. iv. 1.
† Gen. xxxii. 14, 15.
‡ Gen xxxi. 40.
§ Psal. c. 3.

the "good Shepherd of the sheep*," and the apostle Peter styles him the "chief Shepherd†." His faithful ministers have the honour to be under shepherds; he appoints and qualifies them to feed his flock. They are the messengers of his will, but they can do nothing without him; they can only communicate what they receive, and cannot watch over the flock, unless they are themselves watched over by him‡. For, with respect to efficacy, he is the chief, and indeed the sole Shepherd. The eyes of all are upon him, and *his* eye is upon and over all his flock. The Old Testament church had a shepherd, and their shepherd was Jehovah§. Unless therefore the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls likewise be Jehovah, we fall unspeakably short of the privilege of ancient Israel, if their Shepherd was almighty, and if *ours* could be but a creature. Surely we could not then say, what yet the apostle affirms, that we have a "better covenant, established upon better promises‖;" since MESSIAH himself is expressly declared to be the surety and the mediator of this covenant. But would it not be better, upon this supposition, with David, who could say, Jehovah is my Shepherd, than with us, who are intrusted to the care of a delegated and inferior keeper, if Jesus be not Jehovah? Besides, who but Jehovah can relieve the necessities of multitudes in all places, in the same moment, and be equally near and attentive to them in every age? The sinner, who is enlightened to know himself, his wants, enemies, and dangers, will not dare to confide in any thing short of an almighty arm; he needs a shepherd, who is full of wisdom, full of care, full of power; able, like the sun, to shine upon millions at once,

* John x. 11. 14. † 1 Pet. v. 4. ‡ Psal. cxxvii. 1.
§ Psal. xxiii. 1. ‖ Heb. viii. 6.

and possessed of those incommunicable attributes of Deity, omniscience and omnipresence. Such is our great Shepherd; and he is eminently the good Shepherd also, for he laid down his life for the sheep, and has redeemed them to God by his own blood.

II. A *shepherd* is a relative name; it has reference to a *flock*. This great and good Shepherd has a flock, whom he loved from everlasting, and whom having loved, he will love to the end*.

Formosi pecoris custos, formosior ipse!

He humbled himself for their sakes, submitted to partake of their nature and their sorrows, took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of sinful flesh. He died for his sheep, "the just for the "unjust†," to redeem them from the curse of the law, from the guilt and dominion of sin, from the power of Satan, and to bring them to God. They, by nature are all "gone astray, every one to his own way‡;" but having thus bought them with his blood, in his own appointed time, he seeks, finds, and restores his sheep. By the power of his word and Spirit, he makes himself known to their hearts, causes them to hear and understand his voice, and guides them into his fold. Then they become his sheep in the sense of my text. They are under his immediate protection and government.

Considered as individuals, they are fitly described by the name of *sheep*. A sheep is a weak, defenceless, improvident creature; prone to wander, and if once astray, is seldom known to return of its own accord. A sheep has neither strength to fight with the wolf, nor speed to escape from him; nor has it the foresight of the ant, to

* John xiii. 1. † 1 Pet. iii. 18. ‡ Isa. liii. 6.

provide its own sustenance. Such is our character, and our situation: unable to take care of ourselves, prone to wander from our resting place, exposed to enemies which we can neither withstand nor avoid, without resource in ourselves, and taught, by daily experience, the insufficiency of every thing around us. Yet, if this Shepherd be our shepherd, weak and helpless as we are, we may be of good courage. If we can say with David, "The Lord is my shepherd," we may make the same inferences which he did, "Therefore I shall not want: "therefore I need not fear."

Collectively, they are a *flock*. They are not, indeed, in one place. They are scattered abroad, dispersed through different ages and countries, separated by seas and mountains, and, too often, by misapprehensions and prejudices, by names and forms; and only a very small part of the flock are known to each other. But they are all equally known to him, and equally under his eye. In his view they are one flock, one body; they are animated by one and the same spirit; their views, hopes, and aims, are the same; and yet a little while, they shall be all brought together, a number without number, to rejoice and to join in worship, before his throne of glory. For they have an inheritance reserved for them in heaven*, and they shall be safely kept, while they are sojourners upon earth, for the Shepherd of Israel is their keeper.

III. "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd." The word is not restrained to feeding. It includes all the branches of the shepherd's office. He shall act the part of a shepherd to his flock. We have a beautiful miniature description of what he has engaged to do, and

* 1 Pet. i. 4, 5.

what he actually does, for his people, as their Shepherd, in the twenty-third Psalm. And the subject is more largely illustrated in the thirty-fourth chapter of Ezekiel's prophecy. His sheep, from age to age, have been witnesses to the truth of his promises. He has a flock at present who rejoice in his care, and greater multitudes, as yet unborn, shall successively arise in their appointed seasons, "and call him blessed*." For he is the "same yesterday, to-day, and for ever."

"He feeds them." He leads them into green and pleasant pastures. These pastures are, his word and ordinances, by which he communicates to them of his own fulness; for in strict propriety of speech, he himself is their food. They eat his flesh and drink his blood†. This was once thought a hard saying‡ by some of his professed followers, and is still thought so by too many. But it is his own saying, and therefore I am not concerned, either to confirm or to vindicate it. The knowledge they receive by faith, of his incarnation and sufferings unto death, of the names he bears, and of the offices and relations in which he is pleased to act for them, is the life and food of their souls. The expression of feeding them, is agreeable to the analogy he has been pleased to establish, between the natural and the spiritual life. As the strength of the body is maintained and renewed by eating and drinking; so they who, in this sense, feed upon him in their hearts by faith with thanksgiving, even *they* live§ by him; "for his flesh is meat "indeed, and his blood is drink indeed."

"He guides them." First by his example. He has trodden the path of duty and trial before them; and they

* Psal. lxxii. 17. † John vi. 54.
‡ John vi. 60. § John vi. 57.

perceive and follow his footsteps. Again, by his word and spirit he teaches them the way in which they should go; and both inclines and enables them to walk in it*. He guides them, likewise, by his providence; he appoints the bounds of their habitations, the line and calling in which they are to serve him, and orders and adjusts the circumstances of their lives according to his infinite wisdom, so as, finally, to accomplish his gracious designs in their favour.

"He guards them." It is written concerning him, "He shall stand and feed in the strength of the Lord, "in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God†." If we conceive of a flock of sheep feeding in the midst of wolves, who are restrained from breaking in upon them, not by any visible enclosure, but merely by the power of the shepherd's eye, which keeps them in awe and at a distance, it will give us some idea of the situation of his people. He provides them food in the midst of many and mighty‡ enemies, who envy them their privilege, but cannot prevent it. If he should withdraw his attention from the flock, for a single minute, they would be worried. But he has promised to keep them night and day§, and every moment; therefore their enemies plot and rage in vain. Their *visible* foes are numerous; but if we could look into the *invisible world*, and take a view of the subtilty, malice, machinations, and assiduity of the powers of darkness, who are incessantly watching for opportunities of annoying them, we should have a most striking conviction, that a flock so defenceless and feeble in themselves, and against which such a com-

* Isa. xxx. 21. † Micah v. 4.
‡ Psal. xxiii. 5. § Isa. xxvii. 3.

bination is formed, can only be kept by the power of God.

"He heals them." A good shepherd will examine the state of his flock. But there is no attention worthy of being compared with his. Not the slightest circumstance in their concerns escapes his notice. When they are ready to faint, borne down with heavy exercises of mind, wearied with temptations, dry and disconsolate in their spirits, he seasonably revives them. Nor are they in heaviness without a need-be for it. All his dispensations towards them are medicinal, designed to correct, or to restrain, or to cure, the maladies of their souls. And they are adjusted, by his wisdom and tenderness, to what they can bear, and to what their case requires. It is he likewise, who heals their bodily sickness, and gives them help in all their temporal troubles. He is represented to us, as counting their sighs*, putting their tears into his bottle, recording their sorrows in his book of remembrance; and even, as being himself "touched "with a feeling of their infirmities†," as the head feels for the members of the body.

"He restores them." The power and subtilty of their enemies are employed to force or entice them from his rule; and too often prevail for a season. The sheep turn aside unto forbidden paths; and whenever they do, they would wander further and further, till they were quite lost again, if he were not their Shepherd. If he permits them to deviate, he has a time to convince them, "that it was an evil and a bitter thing to forsake the Lord "their Shepherd‡," and to humble them, and to bring them back. Thus they become more sensible of their

* Psal. lvi. 8. † Heb. iv. 15. ‡ Jer. ii. 19.

own weakness, and of their obligations to his gracious care; for he will not suffer their enemies to triumph over them. He will not lose one of his true flock; not one convinced sinner, who has, in deed and in truth, surrendered and intrusted his all to him. They must, and they shall, smart and mourn for their folly; but he will, in due season, break their snares, and lead them again into the paths of peace, for his own name's sake.

The flock are not all *sheep*. There are among them *lambs*. These are especially mentioned, and for these he expresses a peculiar tenderness. "He will ga-"ther them with his arm, and carry them in his bosom." Though they are weaklings, they shall not be left behind. This is a beautiful and pathetic image. If a poor lamb is weary, and unable to keep up with the *flock*, it shall be carried. This clause affords encouragement,

1. To young people. Early serious impressions are often made upon the hearts of children, which we are to cherish by directing their thoughts to the compassion of the good Shepherd, who has said, "Suffer little children "to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is "the kingdom of God*." This high and holy One, who humbles himself to notice the worship of the heavenly host, hears the prayers of worms upon the earth; and his ear is open to the prayers of a child, no less so than to the prayer of a king.

2. To young converts. These, at whatever age, are children in the Lord's family, lambs in his flock. They are as yet, weak, unsettled, and unexperienced. Almost every day brings them into a new and untried situation. They often meet with opposition and discouragement,

* Mark x. 14.

where they have promised themselves help and countenance. Perhaps their nearest friends are displeased with them. They are liable, likewise, while they are inquiring the way to Zion, to be perplexed by the various opinions and angry contentions prevailing among the different religious persons or parties to whom they may address themselves. They are frequently discouraged by the falls and miscarriages of professors, some of whom, it is possible they may have admired and looked up to, as patterns for their own imitation. Add to these things, what they suffer from new and unexpected discoveries of the evil and deceitfulness of their hearts; the mistakes they commit, in judgment and practice, for want of a more solid and extensive knowledge of the Scriptures; and the advantage the great enemy of their souls derives from these their various difficulties to assault their peace and obstruct their progress. What would become of them in such circumstances, if their faithful Shepherd had not promised to lead, and uphold them, with the arm of his power?

There is, likewise, particular mention made of "those "who are with young." These he will gently lead. If we take the word according to our version, it may signify a state of conviction or trouble. "Many are the "afflictions of the righteous*," by which they are often wearied and heavy laden. But when their spirits are overwhelmed within them, he knoweth their path. Jacob would not permit his cattle that were with young, to be over-driven for one day, lest they should die†. Much less will this good Shepherd suffer the burdened among his flock to be hurried and tempted beyond what they are able, or what he will enable them, to bear.

* Psal. xxxiv. 19. † Gen. xxxiii. 13.

But the word signifies, those that *have young*, rather than those that *are with young*. Two sorts of persons in the Lord's flock, who come under this description, feel an especial need of his compassion, tenderness, and patience.

1. He only knows the feelings of the hearts of *parents;* what solicitude and anxiety they have for their young ones, the sucklings, if I may so speak, of the flock, which mingle with all their endeavours, to manage rightly the important charge committed to them, and to bring their "children up in the nurture and admonition of "the Lord."

2. Ministers, likewise, have painful exercises of mind. The apostle Paul speaks of "travailing in birth again, "*till* Christ be formed in our hearers*." When we know of any newly awakened, and beginning to seek their salvation, how solicitous is our care to bring them forward, to comfort them, to warn them against the devices of their hearts, and of their enemies! And how piercing our grief and disappointment, if they miscarry! How much is felt in sympathy for the trials of the flock! What wisdom, faithfulness, courage, meekness, and unction from on high, are necessary to the due discharge of what we owe to the flocks of which we have the oversight! Who is sufficient for these things? And when we have done our best, our all, what defects and defilements have we to mourn over? But this is our great consolation, that he, who knows us, and leads us, considers "our frame, and remembers that we are but dust."

In this delineation of the character and conduct of the "Great Shepherd of the sheep†," we have an af-

* Gal. iv. 19. † Heb. xiii. 20.

fecting exemplar and pattern, for the imitation of the who act in the honourable office of under-shepher and are called, by their profession and engagement, feed his sheep and lambs. Whether there be any n nisters in our assembly or not, you will at least perm me to speak a word to my own heart; which may, hope, at the same time, impress your minds with a sen of our great need of your prayers. "Brethren, pr "for us*," and "pray to the Lord of the harvest, th "he may send forth more faithful labourers into h "harvest†." For it is his work alone. It is not n cessary, that a minister of the Gospel should be in t first line of those who are admired for their abilities literature; much less that he should be distinguish by such titles, honours, and emoluments, as this wor can give. But it is necessary, and of the last impor ance to his character and usefulness here, and to h acceptance in the great day of the Lord, that he shou have a shepherd's eye and a shepherd's heart. H must serve the flock, "not for filthy lucre, or by co "straint,‡" (that constraint, which the apostle attr butes to the love of Christ, only excepted,) "but wi "ingly," and with a view to their edification. And h must, indeed, *serve* them, not acting as a "lord ov "God's heritage, but as an example to the flock." N preaching "himself§," perverting his sacred office t the purposes of ambition or vain glory, or the acqu sition of wealth; but preaching Christ Jesus the Lor and employing all his powers to turn sinners from th error of their ways. "He who winneth souls is wise‖ If it be wisdom to propose the noblest end, the fait

* 1 Thess. v. 25. † Matt. ix. 38. ‡ 1 Pet. v. 2, 3.
§ 2 Cor. iv. 5. ‖ Prov. xi. 30.

ful minister is wise; the end at which he aims, in subordination to the will and glory of God, is the salvation of souls; and the recovery of one immortal soul to the favour and image of God, is and will at length be found a greater and more important event, than the deliverance of a whole kingdom from slavery or temporal ruin. If it be wisdom, to pursue a right end by the fittest means, he is wise; he knows the Gospel of Christ to be the power of God, the appointed, the effectual, the only sufficient mean for accomplishing his great purpose; therefore, however unfashionable it may be, he is not ashamed of it, he preaches it, and he glories in it. If it be an effect of wisdom, not to be deterred from the prosecution of a great and noble design, by the censure and dislike of weak and incompetent judges; the faithful minister is truly wise. He loves his fellow-creatures, and would willingly please them for their good, but he cannot fear them, because he fears and serves the Lord. He looks forward, with desire, to the day of that solemn and general visitation, when the "Shepherd and Bishop of souls shall himself appear*." And if he may then stand among those who are pardoned and accepted in the Beloved, and receive the "crown of life, which his Lord has promised to them "that love him†"—this thought fully reconciles him to the trials of his situation; and however depreciated, misrepresented, opposed, or ill-treated here, he can say, "None of these things move me, neither count I "my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my course "with joy, and the ministry which I have received of "the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of "God‡."

* 1 Pet. ii. 25.; v. 4. † 2 Tim. iv. 8. ‡ Acts xx. 24.

There is a counterpart to this character, described in strong and glowing language by the prophets. There are idle shepherds, who feed not the flock, but themselves*; who neither attempt to heal the sick, to strengthen the feeble, to bind up that which is broken, nor recover that which has been driven away; shepherds†, who cannot understand, greedy lovers of gain —and who, by a change of metaphor, are compared to slumbering watchmen, and dumb dogs that cannot bark. The New Testament teaches us to expect that such persons, under the name of ministers, will be found likewise in the visible church of Christ; men of corrupt minds‡, destitute of the truth, who serve not the Lord Jesus; but their own belly; men who are of the world§, and speak of the world; and therefore the world heareth and favoureth them. But, alas!—neither the wretched slave who toils at the galley-oar, nor he that is doomed to labour in a deep mine, where the light of the sun never reaches him, nor the lunatic who howls in a chain, are such emphatical objects of our compassion, as the unhappy man who prostitutes the name and function of a minister of Christ to the gratification of his pride and avarice; and whose object is not the welfare of the flock, but the possession of the fleece; who‖ intrudes into the post of a watchman, but gives no alarm of the impending danger. If the Scriptures be true; if the Gospel be not indeed, as pope Leo the tenth profanely styled it, a lucrative fable; the more he accumulates riches, the more he rises in dignity, the more his influence extends, the more he is to be commi-

* Ezek. xxxiv. 2. † Isa. lvi. 10, 11.
‡ 1 Tim. vi. 5; Rom. xvi. 18. § 1 John iv. 5.
‖ Ezek. xxxiii. 7, 8.

serated. He may have the reward he seeks: he may be admired and flattered; he may for a season, be permitted to withstand and discountenance the efforts of the Lord's faithful servants; he may shine in the accomplishments of a scholar or a courtier: but nothing less than repentance, and faith in the Redeemer, whose name and cause he has dishonoured, can finally screen him from the full effect of that terrible denunciation—"Wo to the idle shepherd that forsaketh" or neglecteth "the flock! The sword shall be upon his arm, and "upon his right eye: his arm shall be clean dried up, "and his right eye shall be utterly darkened*."

SERMON XIV.

REST FOR THE WEARY.

MATTH. xi. 28.

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

WHICH shall we admire most; the majesty or the grace, conspicuous in this invitation? How soon would the greatest earthly monarch be empoverished, and his treasures utterly exhausted, if all that are poor and miserable had encouragement to apply freely to him, with a promise of relief fully answerable to their wants and wishes! But the riches of Christ are unsearchable and inexhaustible. If millions of millions of distressed sinners seek to *him* for relief, he has a sufficiency for

* Zech. xi. 17.

them all. His mercy is infinite to pardon all their sins; his grace is infinite to answer and exceed their utmost desires; his power is infinite, to help them in all their difficulties. A number, without number, have been thus waiting upon him, from age to age; and not one of them has been sent away disappointed and empty. And the streams of his bounty are still flowing, and still full. Thus the Sun, his brightest material image, has been the source of light to the earth, and to all its inhabitants, from the creation; and will be equally so to all succeeding generations, till time shall be no more. There is, indeed, an appointed hour when the sun shall cease to shine, and the course of nature shall fail. But the true Sun, the Sun of Righteousness*, has no variableness nor shadow of turning; and they who depend upon him while in this world, shall rejoice in his light for ever. Can we hesitate to accept of these words, as affording a full proof of the divine character, the proper Godhead of our Lord and Saviour, supposing only that he meant what he said, and that he is able to make his promise good? Can a creature, however excellent and glorious, use this language? Can a creature discharge the debts, sooth the distresses, and satisfy the desires of every individual who looks to him? Who but the Lord God† can raise up all that are bowed down, and comfort all that mourn?

Again; as is his majesty, so is his mercy. In acts of grace amongst men there are always some limitations. If a king proclaims a pardon to a rebellious nation, there are still exceptions. Some ringleaders are excluded. Either their crimes were too great to be forgiven, or their obstinacy or influence are supposed to

* Mal. iv. 2.; James i. 17. † Psal. cxlvi. 8.; Isa. lxi. 2.

be too great to render their safety consistent with the safety of the state. But the Saviour excludes none but those who wilfully exclude themselves. As no case is too hard for his power, so no person who applies to him is shut out from his compassion. "Him that "cometh to him," whatever his former character or conduct may have been, "he will in nowise cast out*." This glorious exercise of sovereign mercy is no less a divine attribute, than the power by which he created the heavens and the earth. It is the consideration of his mercy in pardoning sin, and in saving sinners, which causes that admiring exclamation of the prophet, "Who "is a God like unto thee†?"

This passage, (including the two following verses,) closes the first part of the Oratorio. In tracing the series of the Scriptures thus far, we have considered several signal prophecies which foretold his appearance; we have seen their accomplishment in his birth, and have, I hope, joined with the heavenly host, in ascribing glory to God in the highest, for this unspeakable gift and effect of his love. We have learnt from the prophets, his characters, as the great Restorer, and the great Shepherd. The evangelist proposes him to our meditation here, in a gracious and inviting attitude, as opening his high commission, proclaiming his own sovereign authority and power, and declaring his compassionate purpose and readiness to give refreshment and rest to the weary and heavy laden.

The two principal points in the text are, the *invitation* and the *promise*.

I. The *invitation* is expressed in very general terms. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy

* John vi. 37. † Micah vii. 18.

"laden." There is no qualifying or restraining clause, to discourage any person who is willing to accept it. Whoever hath an ear to hear, let him hear. "Let "him that is athirst come, and whosoever will, let him "take of the water of life freely*." I cannot doubt but these words authorize me to address myself to every person in the assembly. I speak first to you who are "spending your money for that which satisfieth not†;" who are wearied in seeking happiness where it is not to be found, and "in digging pits, and hewing out cisterns "for yourselves, which will hold no water‡," and have hitherto been regardless "of the fountain of living wa-"ters," which is always near you. While you are pursuing the wealth or honours of this world, or wasting your time and strength in the indulgence of sensual appetites, and look no higher, are you, indeed, happy and satisfied? Do you find the paths in which you are led, or rather hurried and driven on to be the "paths of "pleasantness and peace§?" With what face can you charge the professors of religion with hypocrisy, if you pretend to satisfaction in these ways? We have trodden them far enough ourselves, to be assured that there are feelings in your heart which contradict your assertion. You know that you are not happy, and we know it likewise. Are you quite strangers to a secret wish, that you had never been born? or that you could change condition with some of the brute creation? "Are you "not heavy laden," burdened with guilt, and fears, and forebodings; harassed with crosses, disappointments, and mortifications? Are you not often, at least sometimes, like children in the dark, afraid of being alone;

* Rev. xxii. 17. † Isa. lv. 2. ‡ Jer. ii. 13. § Prov. iii. 17.

unable to support the reflections which are forced upon you in a solitary hour, when you have nothing to amuse you? And while you seem so alert, and upon the wing, after every kind of dissipation within your reach, is not a chief motive that impels you, a desire, if possible, of hiding yourselves from yourselves, and of calling off your attention from those thoughts which, like vultures, are ready to seize you, and prey upon you, the moment they find you unemployed? And how often do your poor expedients fail you, especially in a time of trouble or on a sick bed? What comfort does the world afford you then? What relief do you then derive from the companions of your vain and gay hours? Most probably, at such a season, they stand aloof from you; the house of mourning, or the chamber of sickness, are no less unpleasing to them than to yourself. They do not choose the pain of being reminded, by a sight of your distress, how soon the case may be their own. Or, if they visit you, you find them miserable comforters. But I have to speak to you of one who is able to comfort you, in all seasons, and under all circumstances; whose favour is better than life. And will you still refuse to hear his voice? What hard thing does the Lord require of you? Only to come to him, for that peace and rest to which you have hitherto been strangers. But, though you are invited, I know that of yourselves you will not come; you *will* not, and therefore, you cannot. Be assured, however, the invitation does not mock you; and if you finally refuse it, the fault will lie at your own doors. But may I not hope you will refuse no longer? The preaching of the Gospel is his appointment, and has a great effect, when accompanied with the energy of his Holy Spirit, to make "a willing people in the day of his power."

There are others, however, to whom this invitation speaks more directly. The convinced sinner is "heavy "laden" with the guilt of sin, and "wearied" with ineffectual strivings against it. He is weary of the yoke and burden of the law, when he can neither answer its commands with cheerful and acceptable obedience, nor see any way of escaping the penalty which is due to transgressors. He sighs earnestly and anxiously for pardon and liberty. If he has an interval of comparative peace and hope, it is more derived from some occasional fervour and liveliness in the frame of his spirit, than from the exercise of faith; and therefore, as that fervour abates, (and it will not always remain at the same height,) his fears return. If, in such a favoured moment, he feels little solicitation or trouble from the evil propensities of his heart, he is willing to hope they are subdued, and that they will trouble him no more; but his triumph is short, the next return of temptation revives all his difficulties, and he is again brought into bondage. For nothing but the knowledge of the Saviour, and the supplies of his Spirit, can give stable peace to the mind, or victory over sin. A repetition of these disappointments and changes fixes a heavy burden and distress upon the mind. But here is help provided exactly suitable to the case. Comply with his invitation, "Come to him, and he will surely give "you rest."

But what is it "to come to Christ?" It is, to believe in him, to apply to him, to make his invitation and promise our ground and warrant for putting our trust in him. On another occasion, he said, "He that cometh "to me shall never hunger, and he that believeth in me

" shall never thirst*." The expressions are of the same import. When he was upon earth, many who came to him, and even followed him for a season, received no saving benefit from him. Some came to him from motives of malice and ill-will, to ensnare or insult him. Some followed him for loaves and fishes; and of others, who were frequently near him, he complained, " Ye " will not come unto me, that ye may have life†." But they who were distressed, and came to him for relief, were not disappointed. "To come to him," therefore, implies a knowledge of his power, and an application for his help. To us he is not visible, but he is always near us; and as he appointed his disciples to meet him in Galilee‡ previous to his ascension, so he has promised to be found of those who seek him, and wait for him in certain means of his own institution. He is seated upon a throne of grace; he is to be sought in his word, and where his people assemble in his name, for he has said, " There will I be in the midst of them§." They therefore who read his word, frequent his ordinances, and pray unto him, with a desire that they may know him, and " be remembered with the favour which " he beareth to his own people‖," answer the design of my text. They come to him, and he assures them, that whoever they are, he will in nowise cast them out. If they thus come to him, they will of course " come " out from the world and be separate**." If they apply to him for refuge, they will renounce all other refuge and dependence, and trust in him alone; according to the words of the prophet, " Asshur shall not save us, " we will not ride upon horses, neither will we say any

* John vi. 35. † John v. 40. ‡ Matth. xxviii. 16.
§ Matth. xviii. 20. ‖ Psal. cvi. 4. ** 2 Cor. vi. 17.

"more to the works of our hands, Ye are our gods, for "in thee the fatherless, the helpless and comfortless, "findeth mercy*."

II. The *promise* is, "I will give you rest†." The word signifies both rest and refreshment. He gives a relief and cessation from former labour and bondage, and superadds a peace, a joy, a comfort, which revives the weary spirit, and proves itself to be that very satisfaction which the soul had been ignorantly and in vain seeking amongst the creatures and the objects of sense.

This "rest" includes a freedom from the forebodings and distressing accusations of a guilty conscience; from the long and fruitless struggle between the will and the judgment; from the condemning power of the law; from the tyranny of irregular and inconsistent appetites; and from the dominion of pride and self, which makes us unhappy in ourselves, and hated and despised by others: a freedom likewise from the cares and anxieties, which, in such an uncertain world as this, disquiet the minds of those who have no solid Scriptural dependence upon God, and especially a freedom from the dread of death, and of the things which are beyond it. In these and other respects, the believer in Jesus enters into a present rest. He is under the guidance of infinite wisdom, and the protection of almighty power; he is permitted "to cast all his cares upon the Lord‡," and is assured that the Lord "careth for him." So far as he possesses by faith the spirit and liberty of his high calling, he is in perfect peace. The prophet Jeremiah has given a beautiful description and illustration

* Hos. xiv. 3.

† Compare 1 Cor. xvi. 18.; 2 Cor. vii. 13.; Philem. vii. 20.

‡ 1 Pet. v. 7.

of this rest of a believer*; which is rendered more striking, by being contrasted with the miserable state of those who live without God in the world. "Thus saith "the Lord, Cursed is the man that trusteth in man, and "maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from "the Lord. For he shall be like the heath in the de-"sert, and shall not see when good cometh, but shall "inhabit the parched places of the wilderness, in a salt "land not inhabited." But, "Blessed is the man that "trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is; for "he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that "spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see "when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and "shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither "shall cease from yielding fruit."

But, besides *rest*, there is *refreshment*. There are pleasures and consolations in that intercourse and communion with God to which we are invited by the Gospel, which, both in kind and degree, are unspeakably superior to all that the world can bestow, and such as the world cannot deprive us of; for they have no necessary dependence upon outward situation or circumstances; they are compatible with poverty, sickness, and sufferings. They are often most sensibly sweet and lively, when the streams of creature-comfort are at the lowest ebb. Many have been able to say with the apostle, "As the sufferings of Christ," those which we endure for his sake, or submit to from his hand, "abound in "us, so our consolation in Christ also aboundeth†." The all-sufficient God can increase these communications of comfort from himself, to a degree beyond our ordinary conceptions, so as not only to support his

* Jer. xvii. 5—8. † 2 Cor. 1. 6.

people under the most exquisite pains, but even to suspend and overpower all sense of pain, when the torment would otherwise be extreme. And he has sometimes been pleased to honour the fidelity of his servants, and to manifest his own faithfulness to them by such an interposition. One well-attested instance our own martyrology affords, that of Mr. Bainham, who suffered in the reign of queen Mary. When he was in the fire, he addressed himself to his persecutors to this effect: "You call for miracles in proof of our doc- "trine, now behold one; I feel no more pain from "these flames than if I was laid upon a bed of roses." But in ordinary cases, and in all cases, they who taste how good the Lord is to them that seek him, how he cheers them with the light of his countenance, and what supports he affords them in the hour of need, can, without regret, part with the poor perishing pleasures of sin, and encounter all the difficulties they meet with in the path of duty. Whatever their profession of his name, and their attachment to his cause may have cost them, they will acknowledge that it has made them ample amends.

Come therefore unto him, venture upon his gracious word, and you shall find rest for your souls! Can the world outbid this gracious offer? Can the world promise to give you rest, when you are burdened with trouble? when your cisterns fail, and your gourds wither? or when you are terrified with the approach of death, when your pulse intermits, when you are about to take a final farewell of all you ever saw with your eyes, and an awful, unknown, untried, unchangeable eternity is opening upon your view? Such a moment most certainly awaits you; and when it arrives, if you die in your senses, and are not judicially given up to

hardness and blindness of heart, you will assuredly tremble, if you never trembled before. Oh! be persuaded; may the Lord himself persuade you to be timely wise; to seek him now while he may be found, to call upon him while he is yet near; lest that dreadful threatening should be your portion: "Because I have "called and ye refused, I have stretched out my hand, "and no man regarded; I also will laugh at your ca- "lamity, I will mock when your fear cometh*."

SERMON XV.

MESSIAH'S EASY YOKE.

MATT. xi. 29, 30.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest to your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

THOUGH the influence of education and example may dispose us to acknowledge the Gospel to be a revelation from God, it can only be rightly understood, or duly prized, by those persons who feel themselves in the circumstances of distress which it is designed to relieve. No Israelite would think of fleeing to a city of refuge†, till, by having unwittingly slain a man, he was exposed to the resentment of the next of kin, the legal avenger of blood; but then, a sense of his danger would induce him readily to avail himself of the appointed method of safety. The skill of a physician may be acknowledged, in general terms, by many; but he is ap-

* Prov. i. 24. 26. † Josh. xx. 2, 3.

plied to only by the sick*. Thus our Saviour's gracious invitation to come to him for rest, will be little regarded, till we really feel ourselves weary and heavy laden. This is a principal reason why the Gospel is heard with so much indifference. For though sin be a grievous illness and a hard bondage, yet one effect of it is, a strange stupidity and infatuation, which renders us, (like a person in a delirium,) insensible of our true state. It is a happy time, when the Holy Spirit, by his convincing power, removes that stupor, which, while it prevents us from fully perceiving our misery, renders us likewise indifferent to the only mean of deliverance. Such a conviction of the guilt and desert of sin, is the first hopeful symptom in a sinner's case; but it is necessarily painful and distressing. It is not pleasant to be weary and heavy laden; but it awakens our attention to him who says, "Come unto me, and I will give you rest," and makes us willing to take his yoke upon us.

Oxen are yoked to labour. From hence the *yoke* is a figurative expression to denote servitude. Our Lord seems to use it here, both to intimate our natural prejudices against his service, and to obviate them. Though he submitted to sufferings, reproach, and death for our sakes; though he invites us, not because he has need of us, but because we have need of him, and cannot be happy without him; yet our ungrateful hearts think unkindly of him. We conceive of him as a hard master; and suppose, that if we engage ourselves to him, we must bid farewell to pleasure, and live under a continual restraint. His rule is deemed too strict, his laws too severe; and we imagine, that we could be more happy upon our own plans, than by acceding to his. Such unjust,

* Matth. ix. 12.

endly, and dishonourable thoughts of him, whose
: is full of tenderness, whose bowels melt with love,
trong proofs of our baseness, blindness, and de-
ty; yet still he continues his invitation, "Come
o me;"—as if he had said, Be not afraid of me.
make the experiment, and you shall find, that what
ave accounted my "*yoke*" is true liberty; and that
y service, which you have avoided as burdensome,
is no burden at all; for "my ways are ways of
asantness, and all my paths are peace." I have a
hope, that many of my hearers can testify from their
happy experience, that, (according to the beau-
expression in our liturgy,) "his service is perfect
edom."

we are really Christians, Jesus is our Master, our
l, and we are his servants. It is in vain to call him
rd, Lord*," unless we keep his commandments.
who know him will love him, and they who love
will desire to please him, not by a course of service
eir own devising, but by accepting his revealed will
e standard and rule, to every part of which they
avour to conform in their tempers and in their con-
. He is likewise our Master in another sense;
is, he is our great Teacher; if we submit to him
ch, we are his "disciples" or "scholars." We
ot serve him acceptably, unless we are taught by

The philosophers of old had their disciples, who
bed their sentiments, and were therefore called after
names, as the Pythagoreans and Platonists, from
agoras and Plato. The general name of Christians,
h was first assumed by the believers at Antioch†,
ibly by divine direction,) intimates that they are

* Luke vi. 46. † Acts xi. 26.

the professed disciples of Christ. If we wish to be truly wise, to be wise unto salvation, we must apply to him. For in this sense, the "disciple" or "scholar" cannot be "above his Master*." We can learn of men no more than they can teach us. But he says, "Learn of me;" and he cautions us against calling any one master upon earth. He does, indeed, instruct his people by ministers and instruments; but unless he is pleased to superadd his influence, what we seem to learn from them only, will profit us but little. Nor are the best of them so thoroughly furnished, nor so free from mistake, as to deserve our implicit confidence. But they whom *he* condescends to teach, shall learn what no instruction, merely human, can impart. Let us consider the peculiar, the unspeakable advantages of being his scholars.

I. In the first place, this great Teacher can give the capacity requisite to the reception of his sublime instructions. There is no prospect of excelling in human arts and sciences, without a previous natural ability, suited to the subject. For instance, if a person has not an ear and a taste for music, he will make but small proficiency under the best masters. It will be the same with respect to the mathematics, or any branch of science. A skilful master may improve and inform the scholar, if he be rightly disposed to learn, but he cannot communicate the disposition. But Jesus can open and enliven the dullest mind; he teaches the blind to see, and the deaf to hear. By nature we are untractable, and incapable of relishing divine truth, however advantageously proposed to us by men like ourselves. But happy are his scholars! he enables them to surmount all difficulties. He takes away the heart of stone, sub-

* Luke vi. 40.

dues the most obstinate prejudices, enlightens the dark understanding, and inspires a genius and a taste for the sublime and interesting lessons he proposes to them. In this respect, as in every other, there is none "teach-" eth like him*."

2. He teacheth the most important things. The subjects of human science are comparatively trivial and insignificant. We may be safely ignorant of them all. And we may acquire the knowledge of them all, without being wiser or better, with respect to the concernments of our true happiness. Experience and observation abundantly confirm the remark of Solomon, that "he who increaseth knowledge, increaseth sorrow; the "eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hear-" ing†." Unless the heart be seasoned and sanctified by grace, the sum total of all other acquisitions is but "vanity and vexation of spirit‡." Human learning will neither support the mind under trouble, nor weaken its attachment to worldly things, nor control its impetuous passions, nor overcome the fear of death. The confession of the learned Grotius, towards the close of a life spent in literary pursuits, is much more generally known than properly attended to. He had deservedly a great name and reputation as a scholar; but his own reflection upon the result of his labours expresses what he learnt, not from his books and ordinary course of studies, but from the Teacher I am commending to you. He lived to leave this testimony for the admonition of the learned, or to this effect: *Ah, vitam prorsus perdidi nihil agendo laboriose:* "Alas, I have wasted my whole life in "taking much pains to no purpose." But Jesus makes his scholars wise unto eternal life, and reveals that know-

* Job. xxxvi. 22. † Eccles. i. 8. 18. ‡ Eccles. ii. 17.

ledge to babes, to persons of weak and confined abilities, of which the wisdom of the world can form no idea.

3. Other teachers, as I have already hinted, can only inform the *head*, but his instructions influence the *heart*. Moral philosophers, as they are called, abound in fine words and plausible speeches, concerning the beauty of virtue, the fitness of things, temperance, benevolence, and equity; and their scholars learn to talk after them. But their fine and admired sentiments are mere empty notions, destitute of life and efficacy, and frequently leave them as much under the tyranny of pride, passion, sensuality, envy, and malice, as any of the vulgar whom they despise for their ignorance. It is well known, to the disgrace of the morality which the world applauds, that some of their most admired sentimental writers and teachers have deserved to be numbered among the most abandoned and despicable of mankind. They have been slaves to the basest and most degrading appetites, and the tenour of their lives has been a marked contradiction to their fine-spun theories. But Jesus Christ effectually teaches his disciples to forsake and abhor whatever is contrary to rectitude or purity; and inspires them with love, power, and a sound mind. And if they do not talk of great things, they are enabled to perform them. Their lives are exemplary and useful, their deaths comfortable, and their memory is precious.

4. The disciples of Jesus are, or may be, *always learning*. His providence and wisdom have so disposed things, in subserviency to the purposes of his grace, that the whole world around them is as a great school; and the events of every day, with which they are connected, have a tendency and suitableness, if rightly improved, to promote their instruction. Heavenly lessons are

ught and illustrated by earthly objects; nor are we ca-
ible of understanding them at present, unless the mode
instruction be thus accommodated to our situation
d weakness. The Scripture* points out to us a won-
rful and beautiful analogy between the outward vi-
le world of nature, and that spiritual state which is
lled the kingdom of God; the former is like a book
itten in cypher, to which the Scripture is the key,
hich, when we obtain, we have the other opened to us.
hus, wherever they look, some object presents itself,
hich is adapted, either to lead their thoughts directly
Jesus, or to explain or confirm some passage in his
rd. So, likewise, the incidents of human life; the
aracters we know, the conversation we hear, the vicissi-
des which take place in families, cities, and nations; in
word, the occurrences which furnish the history of every
y, afford a perpetual commentary on what the Scrip-
res teach concerning the heart of man, and the state
the world, as subject to vanity, and lying in wicked-
ss; and thereby the great truths which it behooves
to understand and remember, are more repeatedly
d forcibly exhibited before our eyes, and brought
me to our bosoms. It is the peculiar advantage of the
sciples of Christ, that their lessons are always before
em and their master always with them.

5. Men who are otherwise competently qualified
r teaching in the branches of science they profess, often
scourage and intimidate their scholars, by the impa-
nce, austerity, and distance of their manner. They
il in that condescension and gentleness which are
cessary to engage the attention and affection of the
nid and the volatile, or gradually to soften and to shame

* John iii. 12.

the perverse. Even Moses, though eminent for his forbearance towards the obstinate people committed to his care, and though he loved them, and longed for their welfare, was at times almost wearied by them*. But Jesus, who knows before-hand the weakness, the dulness, and the refractoriness of those whom he designs to teach, to prevent their fears, is pleased to say, Learn of me, "for "I am meek and lowly." With what meekness did he converse among his disciples while he was with them upon earth! He allowed them, at all times, a gracious freedom of access. He bore with their mistakes, reproved and corrected them with the greatest mildness, and taught them as they were able to bear, with a kind accommodation to their prejudices; leading them on, step by step, and waiting for the proper season of unfolding to them those more difficult points, which, for a time, appeared to them to be hard sayings. And though he be now exalted upon his glorious throne, and clothed with majesty, still his heart is made of tenderness, and his compassions still abound. We are still directed to think of him, not as one who cannot be touched with a feeling of our infirmities, but as exercising the same patience and sympathy towards his disciples now, which so signally marked his character during his state of humiliation. The compliment of the orator to a Roman emperor, though excessive and absurd when addressed to a sinful worm, That they who durst speak to him were ignorant of his greatness, and they who durst not were equally ignorant of his goodness, is a just and literal truth, if applied to our meek and gracious Saviour. If we duly consider his greatness alone, it seems almost presumption in such creatures as we are, to dare to take

* Numb. xi. 11, 12.

y name upon our polluted lips; but then, if we
proportionable sense of his unbounded good-
d grace, every difficulty is overruled, and we feel
y of drawing near to him, though with reverence,
ı the confidence of children when they speak to
:tionate parent.

rson may be *meek*, though in an elevated situation
but Jesus was likewise *lowly*. There was no-
ı his external appearance to intimidate the poor
: miserable from coming to him. He was lowly
ble. Custom, which fixes the force and accep-
f words, will not readily allow us to speak of hu-
ıs applicable to the great God. Yet it is said,
umbleth himself to behold the things that are in
n and in earth*." Humility, in strictness of speech,
tribute of magnanimity; an indifference to the little
:ions by which weak and vulgar minds are af-

In the view of the "high and holy One who
ɔiteth eternity†," all distinctions that can obtain
creatures vanish; and he humbles himself no less
ce the worship of an angel, than the fall of a
w to the ground. But we more usually express
ea by the term *condescension*. Such was the
hat was in Christ‡. It belonged to his dignity,
d of all, to look with an equal eye upon all his
es. None could recommend themselves to him
ir rank, wealth, or abilities, the gifts of his own
; none were excluded from his regard, by the want
ɜe things which are in estimation among men.
ɔ stain the pride of human glory, he was pleased
me a humble state. "Though he was rich, he
ɜ himself poor§," for the sake of those whom he

cxiii. 6. † Isa. lvii. 15. ‡ Phil. ii. 5. § 2 Cor. viii. 9.

came into the world to save. In this respect he teaches us by his example. "He took upon him the form of a ser-"vant*," a poor and obscure man, to abase our pride, to cure us of selfishness, and to reconcile us to the cross.

The happy effect of his instructions upon those who receive them, is "rest to their souls." This has been spoken to before; but, as it is repeated in the text, I shall not entirely pass it over here. He gives rest to our souls,—By restoring us to our proper state of dependence upon God; a state of reconciliation and peace, and deliverance from guilt and fear; a state of subjection; for till our wills are truly subjected to the will of God, we can have no rest,—By showing us the vanity, of the world, and thereby putting an end to our wearisome desires and pursuits after things uncertain, frequently unattainable, always unsatisfying,—By a communication of sublimer pleasures and hopes than the present state of things can possibly afford,—And, lastly, by furnishing us with those aids, motives, and encouragements, which make our duty desirable, practicable, and pleasant.

How truly then may it be said, that "his yoke is "easy, and his burden light!" such a burden as wings are to a bird, raising the soul above the low and groveling attachments to which it was once confined. They only can rightly judge of the value of this rest who are capable of contrasting it with the distractions and miseries, the remorse and forebodings, of those who live without God in the world.

But we are all, by profession, his scholars. Ought we not seriously to inquire, what we have actually learned from him? Surely the proud, the haughty, the voluptu-

* Phil. ii. 7.

ous, and the worldly, though they have heard of his name, and may have attended on his institutions, have not hitherto sat at his feet, or drank of his spirit. It requires no long train of examination to determine whether you have entered into his rest, or not; or, if you have not yet attained it, whether you are seeking it in the ways of his appointment. It is a rest for the soul, it is a spiritual blessing, and therefore does not necessarily depend upon external circumstances. Without this rest, you must be restless and comfortless in a palace. If you have it, you may be, at least comparatively, happy in a dungeon. To-day, if not before to-day, while it is called to-day, hear his voice; and while he says to you by his word, "Come unto me, and learn of me," let your hearts answer, "Behold, we come unto thee, for thou art the "Lord our God*."

* Jer. iii. 22.

PART II.

SERMON XVI.

THE LAMB OF GOD, THE GREAT ATONEMENT.

JOHN i. 29.

Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!

"GREAT and marvellous are the works of the Lord "God Almighty!" We live in the midst of them; and the little impression they make upon us, sufficiently proves our depravity. He is great in the very smallest; and there is not a plant, flower, or insect, but bears the signature of infinite wisdom and power. How sensibly then should we be affected by the consideration of the *whole*, if sin had not blinded our understandings, and hardened our hearts! In the beginning, when all was dark, unformed, and waste, his powerful word produced light, life, beauty, and order. He commanded the sun to shine, and the planets to roll. The immensity of creation is far beyond the reach of our conceptions. The innumerable stars, the worlds, which, however large in themselves, are, from their remoteness, but barely visible to us, are of little more immediate and known use, than to enlarge our idea of the greatness of their Author. Small, indeed, is the knowledge we have

of our own system; but we know enough to render our indifference inexcusable. The glory of the sun must strike every eye; and in this enlightened age, there are few persons but have some ideas of the magnitude of the planets, and the rapidity and regularity of their motions. Further, the rich variety which adorns this lower creation, the dependence and relation of the several parts, and their general subserviency to the accommodation of man, the principal inhabitant, together with the preservation of individuals, and the continuance of every species of animals, are subjects not above the reach of common capacities, and which afford almost endless and infinite scope for reflection and admiration. But the bulk of mankind regard them not. The vicissitudes of day and night, and of the revolving seasons, are to them matters of course, as if they followed each other without either cause or design. And though the philosophers, who professedly attach themselves to the study of the works of nature, are overwhelmed by the traces of a wisdom and arrangement which they are unable to comprehend; yet few of them are led to reverential thoughts of God, by their boasted knowledge of his creatures. Thus men "live without God in the "world," though they "live, and move, and have their "being in him," and are incessantly surrounded by the most striking proofs of his presence and energy. Perhaps an earthquake, or a hurricane, by awakening their fears, may force upon their minds a conviction of his power over them, and excite an occasional momentary application to him; but when they think the danger over, they relapse into their former stupidity.

What can engage the attention, or soften the obduracy of such creatures? Behold, one wonder more,

greater than all the former; the last, the highest effect of divine goodness! God has so loved rebellious, ungrateful sinners, as to appoint them a Saviour in the person of his only Son. The prophets foresaw his manifestation in the flesh, and foretold the happy consequences—that his presence would change the wilderness into a fruitful field, that he was coming to give sight to the blind, and life to the dead; to set the captive at liberty; to unloose the heavy burden; and to bless the weary with rest. But this change was not to be wrought merely by a word of power, as when he said, "Let there be light, and there was light*." It was great, to speak the world from nothing; but far greater, to redeem sinners from misery. The salvation, of which he is the Author, though free to us, must cost him dear. Before the mercy of God can be actually dispensed to such offenders, the rights of his justice, the demands of his law, and the honour of his government, must be provided for. The early institution and long-continued use of sacrifices, had clearly pointed out the necessity of an atonement; but the real and proper atonement could be made only by MESSIAH. The blood of slaughtered animals could not take away sin, nor display the righteousness of God in pardoning it. This was the appointed, covenanted work of MESSIAH, and he alone could perform it. With this view he had said, "Lo, I come†." And it was in this view, when John saw him, that he pointed him out to his disciples, saying, "Behold the Lamb of "God!"

Three points offer to our consideration:

* Gen. i. 3. † Psai. xl. 7.

I. The title here given to MESSIAH, "The Lamb "of God."

II. The efficacy of his sacrifice, "He taketh away "sin."

III. The extent of it, "The sin of the world."

I. He is "the Lamb of God." The paschal lamb, and the lambs which were daily offered, morning and evening, according to the law of Moses, were of God's appointment; but this lamb was likewise of his providing. The others were but types. Though many, they were all insufficient* to cleanse the consciences of the offerers from guilt; and they were all superseded, when MESSIAH, "by the one offering of himself, once "for all, made an end of sin, and brought in an ever-"lasting righteousness," in favour of all who believe in his name.

This title, therefore, "The Lamb of God," refers to his voluntary substitution for sinners, that by his sufferings and death they who deserved to die might obtain eternal life through him, and for his sake. Mankind were universally chargeable with transgression of the law of God, and were in a state of alienation from him. A penalty in case of disobedience was annexed to the law they had broken; to which they, as offenders, were therefore obnoxious. Though it would be presumptuous in such worms as we are, to determine, upon principles of our own, whether the sovereign Judge of the universe could, consistently with his own glory, remit this penalty without satisfaction, or not; yet since he has favoured us with a revelation of his will upon the point, we may speak more confidently, and affirm, that it was not consistent with his truth and

* Heb. x. 1.

holiness, and the honour of his moral government, to do it, because this is his own declaration. We may now be assured, that the forgiveness of one sinner, and indeed of one sin, by an act of mere mercy, and without any interposing consideration, was incompatible with the inflexibility of the law, and the truth and justice of the Lawgiver. But mercy designed the forgiveness of innumerable sinners, each of them chargeable with innumerable sins; and the declaration that God is thus merciful, was to be recorded and publicly known, through a long succession of ages, and to extend to sins not yet committed. An act of grace so general and unreserved, might lead men, (not to speak of superior intelligences,) to disparaging thoughts of the holiness of God, and might even encourage them to sin, with hope of impunity, if not connected with some provision which might show that the exercise of his mercy was in full harmony with the honour of all his perfections. How God could "be just, and yet justify those*" whom his own righteous constitution condemned, was a difficulty too great for finite understandings to solve. But herein is God glorious. His wisdom propounded, and his love afforded, the adequate, the only possible expedient. He revealed to our first parents his purpose, which in the fulness of time he accomplished, of sending "forth his "Son made of a woman, made under the law, to re-"deem" sinners from "the curse of the law†," by sustaining it for them. Considering the dignity of his person and the perfection of his obedience, his sufferings and death for sins not his own, displayed the heinousness of sin, and the severe displeasure of God against it, in a much stronger light than the execution of the

* Rom. iii. 26. † Gal. iv. 4.

sentence upon the offenders could possibly do. It displays likewise the justice of this sentence, since neither the dignity nor the holiness of the surety could exempt him from suffering; and that though he was the Beloved of God, he was not spared. This is what I understand by atonement and satisfaction for sin.

II. The efficacy of this atonement is complete. "The "Lamb of God," thus slain, "taketh away sin," both with respect to its guilt and its defilement. The Israelites, by looking to the brazen serpent*, were saved from death, and healed of their wounds. "The Lamb "of God" is an object proposed, not to our bodily sight, but to the eye of the mind, which indeed, in fallen man, is naturally blind; but the Gospel-message, enlivened by the powerful agency of the Holy Spirit, is appointed to open it. "He who" thus "seeth the Son, "and believeth on him†," is delivered from guilt and condemnation, is justified from all sin. He is warranted to plead the sufferings of the "Lamb of God" in bar of his own; the whole of the Saviour's obedience unto death, as the ground and title of his acceptance unto life. Guilt or obnoxiousness to punishment being removed, the soul has an open way of access to God, and is prepared to receive blessings from him. For as the sun, the fountain of light, fills the eye that was before blind, the instant it receives sight; so God, who is the fountain of goodness, enlightens all his intelligent creatures according to their capacity, unless they are by sin blinded, and rendered incapable of communion with him. The Saviour is now received and enthroned in the heart, and from his fulness the life of grace is derived and maintained. Thus not only the guilt, but the

* Num. xxi. 9. † John vi. 40.

love of sin, and its dominion, are taken away, subdued by grace, and cordially renounced by the believing pardoned sinner. The blood which frees him from distress, preserves a remembrance of the great danger and misery, from which he has been delivered, warm upon his heart; inspires him with gratitude to his Deliverer, and furnishes him with an abiding and constraining motive for cheerful and universal obedience.

III. The designed extent of this gratuitous removal of sin, by the oblation of "the Lamb of God," is expressed in a large and indefinite manner: he "taketh "away the sin of the world." Many of my hearers need not be told, what fierce and voluminous disputes have been maintained concerning the extent of the death of Christ. I am afraid the advantage of such controversies has not been answerable to the zeal of the disputants. For myself, I wish to be known by no name but that of a Christian, and implicitly to adopt no system but the Bible. I usually endeavour to preach to the heart and the conscience, and to waive, as much as I can, all controversial points. But as the subject now lies directly before me, I shall embrace the occasion, and simply and honestly open to you the sentiments of my heart concerning it.

If, because the death of Christ is here said to take away "the sin of the world," or, (as this evangelist expresses it in another place,) the "whole world*," it be inferred, that he actually designed and intended the salvation of all men, such an inference would be contradicted by fact. For it is certain that all men will not be saved†. It is to be feared, that the greater part of those to whom the word of his salvation is sent, perish

* 1 John ii. 2. † Matth. vii. 13, 14.

in their sins. If therefore he cannot be disappointed of his purpose, since many do perish, it could not be his fixed design that all men should be finally and absolutely saved.

The exceeding great number, once dead in trespasses and sins, who shall be found on his right hand at the great day of his appearance, are frequently spoken of in appropriate and peculiar language. They are styled his sheep*, for whom he laid down his life; his elect †, his own‡; those to whom it is given to believe in his name §; and concerning whom it was "the Father's "good pleasure to predestinate them to the adoption of "children ‖." By nature, "they are children of wrath, "even as others**;" and no more disposed in themselves to receive the truth, than those who obstinately and finally reject it. Whenever they become willing, they are made so, "in a day" of divine "power††;" and wherein they differ, it is grace, "that makes them to differ‡‡." Passages in the Scripture to this purpose are innumerable; and though much ingenuity has been employed to soften them, and to make them speak the language of an hypothesis, they are so plain in themselves, "that he who runs may read." It is not the language of conjecture, but of inspiration, that they whom the Lord God "did foreknow, he also did pre-"destinate to be conformed to the image of his Son§§." And though some serious persons perplex themselves with needless and painful reasonings, with respect to the sovereignty of God in his conduct towards man-

* John x. 11. 16.
† Mark xiii. 27.
‡ John xiii. 1.
§ Phil. i. 29.
‖ Eph. i. 5.
** Eph. ii. 3.
†† Psal. cx. 3.
‡‡ 1 Cor. iv. 7.
§§ Rom. viii. 29.

kind, they all, if truly spiritual and enlightened, stand upon this very ground, in their own experience. Many who seem to differ from us in the way of argumentation, perfectly accord with us, when they simply speak of what God has done for their souls. They know and acknowledge as readily as we, that they were first found of him when they sought him not; and that otherwise they neither should nor could have sought him at all: nor can they give any better reason than this why they are saved out of the world, "That it pleased the Lord "to make them his people*."

But, on the other hand, I cannot think the sense of the expression is sufficiently explained, by saying, that the world, and the whole world, is spoken of, to teach us that the sacrifice of "the Lamb of God" was not confined, like the Levitical offerings, to the nation of Israel only; but that it is available for the sins of a determinate number of persons, called "the elect," who are scattered among many nations, and found under a great variety of states and circumstances in human life. This is undoubtedly the truth, so far as it goes; but not, I apprehend, fully agreeable to the Scriptural manner of representation. That there is an election of grace, we are plainly taught; yet it is not said, "that "Jesus Christ came into the world to save" the elect, but that he came to save "sinners," to "seek and to "save them that are lost†." Upon this ground, I conceive that ministers have a warrant to preach the Gospel to every human creature, and to address the conscience of every man in the sight of God; and that every person who hears this Gospel has thereby a warrant, an encouragement, yea, a command, to apply to

* 1 Sam. xii. 22. † 1 Tim. i. 15; Luke xix. 10.

Jesus Christ for salvation; and that they who refuse, thereby exclude themselves, and perish, not because they never had, nor possibly could have, any interest in his atonement, but simply because they will not come unto him that they may have life. I know something of the cavils and curious reasonings which obtain upon this subject, and I know I may be pressed with difficulties, which I cannot resolve to the full satisfaction of inquiring and speculative spirits. I am not disheartened by meeting with some things beyond the grasp of my scanty powers, in a book which I believe to be inspired by Him whose ways and thoughts are higher than ours, "as the heavens are higher than the earth*." But, I believe, that vain reasonings, self-will, an attachment to names and parties, and a disposition to draw our sentiments from human systems, rather than to form them by a close and humble study of the Bible, with prayer for divine teaching, are the chief sources of our perplexities and disputes.

The extent of the atonement is frequently represented, as if a calculation had beed made, how much suffering was necessary for the surety to endure, in order exactly to expiate the aggregate number of all the sins of all the elect; that so much he suffered precisely, and no more; and that when this requisition was completely answered, he said, "It is finished, "bowed his head, and gave up the ghost†." But this nicety of computation does not seem analogous to that unbouded magnificence and grandeur which overwhelm the attentive mind in the contemplation of the divine conduct in the natural world. When God waters the earth, he waters it "abundantly‡." He does not

* Isa. lv. 8, 9. † John xix. 30. ‡ Psal. lxv. 10.

restrain the rain to cultivated or improvable spots, but, with a profusion of bounty worthy of himself, his clouds pour down water with equal abundance upon the barren mountain, the lonely desert, and the pathless ocean. Why may we not say, with the Scripture, that Christ died to "declare the righteousness of God*," to manifest that he is just in justifying the ungodly who believe in Jesus? And for any thing we know to the contrary, the very same display of the evil and demerit of sin, by the Redeemer's agonies and death, might have been equally, necessary, though the number of the elect were much smaller than it will appear to be when they shall all meet before the throne of glory. If God had formed this earth for the residence of one man only; had it been his pleasure to afford him the same kind and degree of light which we enjoy; the same glorious sun, which is now sufficient to enlighten and comfort the millions of mankind, would have been necessary for the accommodation of that one person. So, perhaps, had it been his pleasure to save but one sinner, in a way that should give the highest possible discovery of his justice and of his mercy, this could have been done by no other method than that which he has chosen for the salvation of the innumerable multitudes who will in the great day unite in the song of praise to the Lamb "who loved them, and washed them from their sins in "his own blood." As the sun has a sufficiency of light for eyes, (if there were so many capable of beholding it,) equal in number to the leaves upon the trees, and the blades of grass that grow upon the earth; so in Jesus, the Sun of Righteousness, "there is plenteous "redemption," he "is rich in mercy to all that call

* Rom. iii. 25, 26.

'upon him*;" and he invites sinners, without exception, to whom the word of his salvation is sent, even to the ends of the earth, to "look unto him, that they 'may be saved†."

Under the Gospel dispensation, and by it, God commands "all men, every where, to repent‡." All men, therefore, every where, are encouraged to hope for forgiveness, according to the constitution prescribed by the Gospel; otherwise repentance would be both impracticable and unavailing. And therefore the command to repent implies a warrant to believe in the name of Jesus, as taking away the sin of the world. Let it not be said, that to call upon men to believe, which is an act beyond their natural power, is to mock them. There are prescribed means for the obtaining of faith, which it is not beyond their natural power to comply with, if they are not wilfully obstinate. We have the word of God for our authority. "God cannot be mocked§," neither doth he mock his creatures. Our Lord did not mock the young ruler, when he told him, that if he would sell his possessions upon earth, and follow him, "he should have treasure in heaven‖." Had this ruler no *power* to sell his possessions? I doubt not but that he himself thought he had power to sell them if he pleased. But while he loved his money better than he loved Christ, and preferred earthly treasures to heavenly, he had no *will* to part with them. And a want of *will* in a moral agent, is *a want of power* in the strongest sense. Let none presume to offer such excuses to their Maker as they would not accept in

* Psal. cxxx. 7.; Rom. x. 12. † Isa. xlv. 22.
‡ Acts xvii. 30. § Gal. vi. 7. ‖ Luke xviii. 22.

their own concerns. If you say of a man, he is such a liar that he cannot speak a word of truth; so profane that he cannot speak without an oath; so dishonest that he cannot omit one opportunity of cheating or stealing; do you speak of this disability to good as an extenuation, and because you think it renders him free from blame? Surely you think the more he is disinclined to good, and habituated to evil, the worse he is. A man that *can* speak lies and perjury, that can deceive and rob, but is such an enemy to truth and goodness that he can do nothing that is kind or upright, must be a shocking character indeed! Judge not more favourably of yourself, if you *can* love the world and sensual pleasure, but *cannot* love God; if you can fear a worm like yourself, but live without the fear of God; if you can boldly trample upon his laws, but *will* not, and therefore *cannot*, humble yourself before him, and seek his mercy in the way of his appointment.

We cannot ascribe too much to the grace of God; but we should be careful, that under a semblance of exalting his grace, we do not furnish the slothful and unfaithful* with excuses for their wilfulness and wickedness. God is gracious; but let man be justly responsible for his own evil, and not presume to state his case so, as would, by just consequence, represent the holy God as being the cause of the sin, which he hates and forbids.

The whole may be summed up in two points, which I commend to your serious attention; which it must be the business of my life to enforce; and which, I trust, I shall not repent of having enforced, either at the hour

* Matth. xxv. 16.

of death, or in the day of judgment, when I must give an account of my preaching, and you of what you have heard in this place.

1. That salvation is, indeed, wholly of grace. The gift of a Saviour, the first dawn of light into the heart, all the supports and supplies needful for carrying on the work, from the foundation to the top stone; all is of free grace.

2. That now "the Lamb of God" is preached to you, as taking away the sin of the world; if you reject him, which may the Lord forbid! I say, if you reject him, your blood will be upon your own head. You are warned, you are invited. Dare not to say, "Why "doth he yet find fault, for who hath resisted his "will*?" If he will save me, I shall be saved; if not, what can I do? God is merciful, but he is also holy and just; he is almighty, but his infinite power is combined with wisdom, and regulated by the great designs of his government. He can do innumerable things which he will not do. What he will do, (so far as we are concerned,) his word informs us, "and not one jot "or tittle thereof shall fail †."

* Rom. ix. 19. † Matth. v. 18.

SERMON XVII.

MESSIAH DESPISED, AND REJECTED OF MEN.

ISAIAH liii. 3.

He is despised and rejected of men: a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.

THE heathen moralists, ignorant of the character and perfections of God, the true dignity and immortality of the soul, and the root and extent of human depravity, had no better foundation for what they called virtue than pride; no higher aim in their regulations, than the interests of society and the conduct of civil life. They expressed, indeed, occasionally, some sentiments of a superior kind; but these, however just and valuable upon the principles of revelation, were delusive and impracticable upon their own. And Brutus, one of the most admired characters of antiquity, confessed, just before he put an end to his own life, that having long been enamoured of virtue as a real good, he found it, at last, to be but an empty name. But though they had so little satisfaction or success in the pursuit of virtue, they were so pleased with the idea they formed of it, as generally to suppose, that if virtue could become visible, it would necessarily engage the esteem and admiration of mankind.

There was, however, one remarkable exception to this opinion. The wisdom of Socrates seems to have been, in many respects, different from that of the bulk of their philosophers. Socrates having expressed his idea of a perfect character, a truly virtuous man, ventured to predict the reception such a person, if such a one could

ever be found, would meet with from the world. And he thought, that his practice would be so dissimilar to that of other men, his testimony against their wickedness so strong, and his endeavours to reform them so importunate and unwelcome, that, instead of being universally admired, he would be disliked and hated; that mankind were too degenerate and too obstinate, to bear either the example or the reproof of such a person, and would most probably revile and persecute him, and put him to death as an enemy to their peace.

In this instance, the judgment of Socrates accords with the language of the Old, and with the history of the New Testament. MESSIAH was this perfect character. As such Isaiah describes him. He likewise foresaw how he would be treated, and foretold that he would be "numbered with transgressors," despised and rejected by the very people who were eye-witnesses of his upright and benevolent conduct. And thus, in fact, it proved. When Jesus was upon earth, true virtue and goodness were visibly displayed, and thereby the wickedness of man became signally conspicuous. For they among whom he was conversant, "preferred a robber and a "murderer to him*." They preserved Barabbas, who had been justly doomed to die for enormous crimes, and they nailed Jesus, in his stead, to the cross.

When MESSIAH appeared, the Jews professed to blame the wickedness of their forefathers, who had opposed and slain the prophets. If they regretted the ill-treatment the "servants" of God had formerly received, might it not be hoped that "they would reverence his "Son†?" concerning whom, under this character of MESSIAH, their expectations were raised by the Scrip-

* John xviii. 40. † Matth. xxi. 37.

tures, which were read in their synagogues every Sabbath-day.

But "he was despised and rejected of men." Angels sung praises at his birth, "but men despised him." He took not upon him the nature of angels, but of man, "yet men rejected him." Sinful, helpless men "rejected "and despised" the only Saviour. "He came to his "own, but his own received him not." How lamentable and fatal was their obstinacy? Pretended* Messiahs were eagerly regarded and followed by them; but the true MESSIAH "was despised and rejected of "men!"

Let us consider the clauses of the text separately, in the order in which we read them.

I. "He was despised and rejected of men." It would be a great mistake to imagine that the Jews were the only people capable of this ingratitude and obstinacy. If any person here thinks, Surely I would not have despised him, had I seen his wonderful works, and heard him speak as never man spake; possibly, that thought may prove you to be of the very same spirit with those who, while they thirsted for his blood, ignorantly presumed that, if they had lived in the days of their forefathers, they would not have joined with them in persecuting the prophets†. The prejudices which operated so strongly against our Lord's mission and ministry, were not peculiar to the people of one age or country, but such as are deeply rooted in the nature of fallen man. The same principles which influenced the Jews to oppose and despise his person, still influence multitudes to slight and oppose the doctrine which he taught, and which he commanded his disciples to preach and

* John v. 43. † Matth. xxiii. 30.

perpetuate to the end of the world. In proof of this, it will be sufficient to assign some of the principal causes of the contempt and hatred which he met with from the men of that generation.

I. They "despised him" for what they accounted the meanness of his appearance. Though rich in himself, he became poor for our sakes, and his poverty made him contemptible in their eyes. They expected MESSIAH would appear with external pomp and power. But when they saw him, they scorned him, saying "Is "not this the carpenter's son*?" He who had not money to pay the tribute demanded† of him, nor a house wherein to lay his head, was of small esteem with those who were covetous, proud of worldly distinctions, and fond of the praise and admiration of men?

2. Their contempt was heightened, when this poor man publicly asserted his proper character and claim, demanded their attention and homage, and styled himself in a peculiar sense "the Son of God," "the resur- "rection and the life‡." For this seeming inconsistence between the appearance he made and the honours he assumed, they treated him as a demoniac and a madman§. Their language strongly expressed their sentiments of him, when they asked him with disdain, "Art "thou greater than our father Abraham? Whom makest "thou thyself‖?"

3. They objected to him the low state and former characters of his followers. Some of them were of low rank in life. The most of those who constantly attended him were poor fishermen. Others had been of bad repute, publicans and open sinners. For this

* Matth. xiii. 55. † Matth. xvii. 27. ‡ John v. 18.; xi. 25.
§ John x. 20. ‖ John viii. 53.

they reproached him, and thought they were fully justified in their contempt, while they could say, "Have "any of the rulers or Pharisees believed on him*?"

4. They were further exasperated against him, by the "authority" and severity with which he taught. It is true, he was gentle and meek to all who felt their need of his help, or sincerely desired his instruction. He received them without exception, and treated them with the greatest tenderness. But he vindicated the honour of the law of God, from the corrupt doctrine and traditions of their professed teachers. He exposed and unmasked the hypocrisy of their most admired characters; and compared the men who were in the highest reputation for wisdom and sanctity, to whitened sepulchres, warning the people against them as blind guides and deceivers.

5. These blind guides strengthened the prejudices of their blind followers against him by misrepresentation. They attempted to avail themselves of the Scripture, when they thought it would answer their purpose. They eagerly made the most of a prevailing mistake, that Jesus was born in Galilee, because he was brought up in Nazareth from his infancy. This they urged as a proof that he could not be MESSIAH, who, the prophets had declared, was to be born at Bethlehem in Judea. When he healed diseases on the Sabbath-day, they represented the effects of his compassion as a breach of that strict observance of the Sabbath which was enjoined by the law of Moses, and that therefore he could not be of God†. And when they were not able to deny the reality of his wonderful works, they ascribed them to the agency of Satan‡. We, at this distance of time,

* John vii. 48. † John ix. 16. ‡ Matth. xii. 24.

can easily perceive the folly and madness of their attempts. But the Scribes and Pharisees were the public authorized doctors and teachers of the people, and were supported by the ecclesiastical and civil power, or, as we should now express it, by church and state. The people were not apt to suspect their leaders, whom they thought wiser and better than themselves. Or, if sometimes they hesitated, were expressed by the majesty of his words, or the evidence of his miraculous works, and constrained to say, "Is not this the Son of David*?" they were soon intimidated and silenced by canons and laws; for it was carefully enacted, in order to keep them in subjection, that whoever acknowledged him "should be put out of the synagogue†;" that is, according to our modern language, excommunicated. This among the Jews, as it has often since been among Christians, was a punishment which drew after it terrible consequences. A man must be in good earnest, or rather taught and supported by the grace of God, who could resist such arguments as these.

These things are easily applicable to the church history of succeeding times. The Gospel of Christ has often been, and is to this day, rejected and despised upon similar grounds. Its simplicity and plainness, and the manner of its proposal, adapted to the use and capacity of the vulgar, offend those who are wise in their own conceit, and proud of their own understanding and taste. At the same time they are equally disgusted by the sublimity of its doctrines, which will not submit to the test of their vain reasonings, and can only be received by humble faith. The faithfulness and freedom which its ministers are enjoined to use, give great offence likewise:

* Matth. xii. 23. † John ix. 22.; xii. 42.

and, because they cannot comply with the humours of those who wish them to prophesy smooth things and deceits, they are accounted censorious, uncharitable, and disturbers of the public peace. Again, the dislike and opposition it frequently meets with from persons of great titles and high stations, deter multitudes from pursuing those inquiries which some conviction of the truth would prompt them to, were they not discouraged by the fear of consequences. How often has a dread of the displeasure of doctors, bishops, universities, councils, and popes, or an ignorant, slavish deference to their judgment or decisions, prevented people from following that light which had begun to force itself upon their consciences? How few among those of reputation for wisdom and learning, how few of the great and opulent, have encouraged or espoused the doctrine of the cross? It is, therefore, more properly a subject for lamentation than for wonder, that this way is despised, "and almost "every where spoken against*." Further, as the bulk of those who embrace it are of low condition, so many of them are as free to confess to the praise of the grace of God, as others can be to urge it to their reproach, that till they knew and received this despised Gospel, their characters and practices were vile. Lastly, what unhappy subtilty has been employed, in a way of reason and argument, with an appeal to detached and perverted passages of Scripture, to misrepresent the work of the Holy Spirit, as folly, hypocrisy, or enthusiasm, and even to charge the Gospel itself with giving encouragement to a licentious conduct! In short, the spirit of the world, the arts and influence of designing men, are so powerful, that what our Lord said in Judea,

* Acts xxviii. 22.

holds equally true in Christendom, "Blessed is he who "is not offended in me*."

I have reserved to a distinct paragraph the mention of one cause why the Gospel is frequently despised and reproached; because, though it be no less unjust and unreasonable than those which I have recited, it is more immediately incumbent upon all who name the name of Christ, to prevent it as much as possible; I mean, the scandal which arises from the miscarriages of those who profess it. Offences of this kind must come, "but wo to them by whom they come†." There were pretended Christians, even in the apostles' times, who were "enemies to the cross of Christ‡," and, by their evil conduct, caused the ways of truth to be evil spoken of; and, therefore, we cannot be surprised that there are such persons now. But "you that love the "Lord, hate evil§." There are many who watch for your halting, and are ready to say, "There, there! so "we would have it." It will be in vain for ministers to declare that the doctrines of grace are doctrines according to godliness, unless our testimony is supported by the tempers and conduct of our people: the world will probably judge, rather by what they see in you, than by what they hear from us. Nor will it suffice that they cannot say you are an adulterer, a drunkard, a miser, or a cheat. If you espouse our doctrine, they will expect you to be humble, meek, patient, and benevolent; to find integrity in all your dealings, and a punctual discharge of your duty in every branch of relative life. What must the world think of our principles, if they who avow them are fretful, envious, censorious, discontented, slothful, or unfaithful; or if they

* Matth. xi. 6. † Matth. xviii. 7. ‡ Phil. iii. 18. § Psal. xcvii. 10.

are niggardly and hard-hearted, or voluptuous and dissolute, or implacable and revengeful? They who thus "lay stumbling-blocks before the blind*," and confirm the prejudices of the ignorant, will have much to answer for.

II. It is further said, He was "a man of sorrows, "and acquainted with grief." He was surrounded with sorrows on every side, and grief was his intimate, inseparable companion. Surely this consideration, if any, will animate us "to endure the cross, and to despise "the shame" we may be exposed to for his sake. The illustration of this subject will offer more fully in the sequel. It shall suffice, at present, to assign three causes for his continual sorrows.

1. The *outward course of life*, to which he submitted, for the sake of sinners, exposed him to want, weariness, contempt, and opposition. And though his resignation and patience were perfect, yet he was truly a man, and partaker of our nature, with all its affections and sensibilities which do not imply sin. His feelings, therefore, were human, similar to our own in similar circumstances, and they were often painfully exercised. Once and again we read that he was hungry and had no food; he was thirsty, and was nearly refused a little water to drink, when wearied with his journeying in the heat of the day†. His character was aspersed, his person despised, his words insidiously wrested, his actions misrepresented. He was misunderstood even by his friends‡, betrayed by one disciple, denied by another, and forsaken by the rest. It is hardly possible for his followers to meet with any outward trial which

* Lev. xix. 14. † Matth. iv. 2.; xxi. 18.; John iv. 9.
‡ John vii. 5.

may not remind them of some part of the history of their Lord and Master, "who left them an example of "suffering, that they should" cheerfully "follow his "steps*."

2. His *perfect knowledge* and *foresight* of those sufferings which we emphatically call *his passion.* How often does he speak of them, and describe the circumstances as if they were actually present? Futurity is, in mercy, concealed from us. It would often bereave us of all present comfort, if we knew what the next year, or, perhaps, what the next day would bring forth. If some of you could have foreseen, many years ago, what you have since been brought through, you would probably have sunk under the apprehension; or the stoutest of us might sink now, if we were certainly to know what may be yet before us. But Jesus, long before he made atonement for our sins, had counted the cost. And though his love determined him to save us, the prospect, which was continually present to his view, of the approaching unutterable agonies of his soul, of all that he must endure from God, from the powers of darkness, and from wicked men, when he should "be "made a curse for us, to redeem us from the curse of "the law†;" I say, this tremendous prospect, was, doubtless, a perpetual source of sorrow.

3. *The frame of his spirit.* Whoever has a measure of the mind that was in Christ, must be proportionally burdened and grieved, like righteous Lot in Sodom‡, with the wickedness around him, if he lives in society. Who that has any regard for the honour of God, or the souls of men, can hear and see what passes every hour; how the authority of God is affronted, his goodness

* 1 Pet. ii. 21. † Gal. iii. 13. ‡ 2 Pet. ii. 8.

abused, and his mercy despised, without emotions of grief and compassion? If we are spiritually-minded, we must be thus affected; and we should be more so, if we were more spiritual. But the holiness of MESSIAH, and, consequently, his hatred of sin, was absolutely perfect. His view of the guilt and misery of sinners, was likewise comprehensive and clear. How must he be therefore grieved by the wickedness and insensibility of those with whom he daily conversed! especially as he not only observed the outward conduct of men, but had an intimate knowledge of the evil heart, which is hidden from us. In this sense his sufferings and sorrows began with his early years, and continued throughout the whole of his life. He undoubtedly could say, with an emphasis peculiar to himself, "I beheld the "transgressors, and was grieved;" "rivers of waters ran "down my eyes, because men keep not thy law*."

We call ourselves the followers and servants of him who was despised of men, and encompassed with sorsows. And shall we then "seek great things for our-"selves†," as if we belonged to the present world, and expected no portion beyond it? Or shall we be tremblingly alive to the opinion of our fellow-creatures, and think it a great hardship, if it be our lot to suffer shame for his sake, who endured the cross, and despised the shame for us? Rather may we account such disgrace our glory, and every loss and suffering, that we may endure for him, a gain; while on the other hand, we learn with the apostle Paul, to esteem every gain and honour this world can afford, "to be but loss and dung "in comparison of the excellency of the knowledge of "Christ Jesus our Lord‡."

* Psal. cxix. 136. 158. † Jer. xlv. 5. ‡ Phil. iii. 8.

SERMON XVIII.

VOLUNTARY SUFFERING.

ISAIAH l. 6.

gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting.

THAT which often passes amongst men for resolution
d the proof of a noble, courageous spirit, is, in reality,
e effect and mark of a weak and little mind. At least,
is chiefly owing to the presence of certain circum-
ances, which have a greater influence upon the con-
ıct than any inherent principle. Thus may persons
ıo appear to set death and danger at defiance in the
ıur of battle, while they are animated by the examples
those around them, and instigated by a fear of the
ınishment or shame they would incur if they deserted
eir post, upon a change of situation, as for instance,
ı a bed of sickness, discover no traces of the heroism
r which they were before applauded, but tremble at
e leisurely approach of death, though they were
ought to despise it under a different form. It was
ıt true fortitude, it was rather a contemptible pusil-
ıimity, that determined the celebrated Cato to de-
roy himself. He was afraid of Cæsar; his dread of
ɱ, after his victories, was so great, that he durst not
ok him in the face; and, therefore, he killed himself
avoid him. To the same meanness of sentiment we
ay confidently ascribe the pretended gallantry of mo-
rn duellists. They fight, not because they are not

afraid of death, but because they are impelled by another fear, which makes a greater impression upon a feeble, irresolute mind. They live upon the opinion of their fellow-creatures, and feel themselves too weak to bear the contempt they should meet with from the circle of their acquaintance, if they should decline acting upon the false principles of honour, which pride and folly have established. They have not resolution sufficient to act the part which conscience and reason would dictate, and therefore hazard life, and every thing that is dear to them as men, rather than dare to withstand the prevalence of an absurd and brutal custom.

A patient enduring of affliction, and especially of disgrace and contempt, to which the characters the world most admire are confessedly unequal, is a much surer proof of true fortitude, than any of those actions which the love of praise, the fear of man, or even a mercenary attachment to lucre, are capable of producing. True *magnanimity* is evidenced by the real importance of the end it proposes, and by the steadiness with which it pursues the proper means of attaining that end; undisturbed and unwearied by difficulty, danger, or pain, and equally indifferent to the censure or scorn of incompetent judges. This greatness of mind is essential and peculiar to the character of the Christian—I mean the Christian who deserves the name. His ends are great and sublime, to glorify God, to obtain nearer communion with him, and to advance in conformity to his holy will. To attain these ends, he employs the means prescribed by the Lord, he waits at Wisdom's gates*, and walks in the paths of dependence and obe-

* Prov. viii. 34.

dience. He therefore cannot conform to the prevailing maxims and pursuits of the many, and is liable to be hated and scorned for his singularity But he neither courts the smiles of men, nor shrinks at the thought of their displeasure. He loves his fellow-creatures, and is ready to do them every kind office in his power; but he cannot fear them, because he fears the Lord God.

But this life the Christian lives "by faith in the Son "of God*." Jesus is the source of his wisdom and strength. He likewise is his exemplar. He is crucified to the world by the cross of Christ; and a principal reason of his indifference to the opinion of the world, is the consideration of the manner in which his Lord was treated by it. He is the follower of him who said, "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks "to them that plucked off the hair; I hid not my face "from shame and spitting."

We may observe, from the words, that the humiliation of MESSIAH was *voluntary*, and that it was *extreme*.

I. With respect to his engagement, as the Mediator between God and sinners, a great work was given him to do, and he became responsible; and therefore, in this sense, bound, and under obligation. But his compliance was likewise *voluntary*, for he gave himself up freely to suffer, the just for the unjust. Could he have relinquished our cause, and left us to the deserved consequence of our sins, in the trying hour when his enemies seized upon him, legions of angels†, had they been wanted, would have appeared for his rescue. But if he was determined to save others, then his own suffer-

* Gal. ii. 20. † Matth. xxvi. 53.

ings were unavoidable. Men, in the prosecution of their designs, often meet with unexpected difficulties in their way, which, though they encounter with some cheerfulness, in hope of surmounting them, and carrying their point at last, are considered as impediments; but the sufferings of MESSIAH were essentially necessary to the accomplishment of his great designs, precisely determined, and present to his view beforehand; so that, (as I lately observed,) there was not a single circumstance that happened to him unawares. He knew that no blood but his own could make atonement for sin; that nothing less than his humiliation could expiate our pride; that if he did not *thus* suffer, sinners must inevitably perish; and therefore, (such was his love!) he cheerfully and voluntarily "gave his back to "the smiters, and his cheeks to them that plucked off "the hair." Two designs of vast importance filled his mind, the completion of them was that joy set before him, for the sake of which, "he made himself of no re-"putation, endured the cross, and despised the shame." These were, the glory of God, and the salvation of sinners.

1. The highest end of his mediation was to display the glory of the divine character in the strongest light, to afford to all intelligent creatures* the brightest manifestation they are capable of receiving, of the manifold wisdom of God, his holiness, justice, truth, and love, the stability and excellence of his moral government, all mutually illustrating each other, as combined and shining forth in *his* person, and in his mediatorial work. Much of the glory of God may be seen, by an enlightened eye, in creation; much in his providential

* Eph. iii. 10.

rule and care over his creatures; but the *brightness* of his glory*, the express and full discovery of his perfections, can only be known by Jesus Christ, and the revelation which God his given of himself to the world by him. And, accordingly, we are assured, that the angels, whose knowledge of the natural world is doubtless vastly superior to ours, desire to look into these things; and that the manifold wisdom of God is supereminently made known to principalities and powers in heaven, by the dispensation of his grace to the church redeemed from the earth.

2. Subordinate to this great design, closely connected with it, and the principal effect for which it will be admired and magnified to eternity, is the complete and everlasting salvation of that multitude of miserable sinners, who, according to the purpose of God, and by the working of his mighty power, shall believe in this Saviour; and who, renouncing every other hope, shall put their trust in him, upon the warrant of the promise and command of God, and yield themselves to be his willing and devoted people. Many are their tribulations in the present life, but they shall be delivered out of them all; they shall overcome, they shall be more than conquerors, "by the blood of the Lamb, and the "word of his testimony†;" and then they shall shine like the sun, in the kingdom of heaven. The consummation of their happiness is a branch of the joy which was set before him. For their sakes, that they might be happy, that he might be admired in them, and by them, to the glory of God, who is all in all, he voluntarily substituted himself to sufferings and death. He endured the cross, and he despised the shame. "He

* John i 18.; Heb. 1. 3. † Rev. xii. 11.

"gave his back to the smiters, his cheeks to them that "plucked off the hair; he hid not his face from shame "and spitting."

II. But are we reading a prophecy, or the history of his extreme humiliation? It is a prophecy; how literally and exactly it was fulfilled, we learn from his history by the evangelists. With what cruelty, with what contempt, was he treated, first by the servants in the hall of the high priest, afterwards by the Roman soldiers! Let us consider him, "who endured the "contradiction of sinners against himself*." These words of the apostle suggest some preliminary observations, to prepare our minds for receiving a due impression from the several particulars here mentioned.

When the apostle would dispose believers by an argument or motive, (which, if we fully understood it, would render all other arguments unnecessary,) to endure sufferings and crosses patiently; he says, "Con-"sider him"—he uses a word which is properly a mathematical term, denoting the ratio or proportion between different numbers, or figures, *q. d.* Compare yourselves with him, and his sufferings with your own. Consider who he is, no less than what he endured.

In the apprehensions of men, insults are aggravated in proportion to the disparity between the person who receives and who offers them. A blow from an equal is an offence, but would be still more deeply resented from an inferior. But if a subject, a servant, a slave, should presume to strike a king, it would justly be deemed an enormous crime. But Jesus, the King of kings, and Lord of lords, whom all the angels of God worship, made himself so entirely of no reputation, that

* Heb. xii. 3.

the basest of the people, the servants, the common soldiers, were not afraid to make him the object of their derision, and to express their hatred in the most sarcastic and contemptuous manner. It is said, that he endured the contradiction of "sinners." So, perhaps, do we; but we are sinners likewise, and deserve much more than we suffer, if not immediately from the instruments of our grief, yet from the Lord, who has a right to employ what instruments he pleases to afflict us for our sins. This thought quieted the spirit of David, when his own son rose up against his life, and his own servant cursed him to his face*. But Jesus was holy, harmless, and undefiled, he had done nothing amiss; yet the usage he met with was such as has seldom been offered to the vilest malefactor. Their cruel and scornful contradiction was likewise expressly and directly against "himself;" whereas his people only suffer from unreasonable and wicked men, for his sake, and for their professed attachment to "him." In the most violent persecutions, they who could be prevailed on to renounce his name and his cause, usually escaped punishment, and were frequently favoured and rewarded. And this is still the ground of the world's displeasure; fierce and bitter as their opposition may seem, the way to reconciliation is always open; they are not angry with us further than we avow a dependence upon him, and show ourselves determined to obey him rather than men. If we could forsake him, their resentment would be disarmed, for they mean no more than to intimidate us from his service. I do not think that they who make peace with the world upon these

* 2 Sam. xvi. 11.

terms are esteemed by them for their compliance, but they are seldom disturbed any longer. It is plain, therefore, that if we suffer as Christians, it is for his sake. He likewise suffered for our sake; but how wide is the difference between him and us? We, when the trial is sharp, are in danger of flinching from the cause of our best friend and benefactor, to whom our obligations are so innumerable, and so immense; whereas he gave himself up to endure such things for us, when we were strangers and enemies! He was not only treated with cruelty, but with every mark of the utmost detestation and scorn, which wanton, unfeeling, unrestrained barbarity could suggest.

1. They began to "spit upon him" in the high priest's hall. The Roman soldiers likewise "did spit "upon him," when they had contemptuously arrayed him in a scarlet robe, and bowed the knee before him, in mockery of his title of King. Great as an insult of this kind would be deemed amongst us, it was considered as still greater, according to the customs prevalent in the eastern countries. There, to spit, even in the presence of a person, though it were only upon the ground, conveyed the idea of disdain and abhorrence. But the lowest of the people spit "in the face" of the Son of God. No comparison can fully illustrate this indignity. There is some proportion between the greatest earthly monarch, and the most abject slave. They did not spit upon Alexander, or Cæsar, but upon the Lord of glory.

2. They "buffetted and beat him on the face," and when he meekly offered his cheeks to their blows, "they plucked off the hair." The beard was in those times accounted honourable; and when David's ser-

vants were shaven by the command of Hanun*, they were ashamed to be seen. But Jesus was not shaven. With savage violence they tore off the hair of his beard; while he, like a sheep before the shearers, was dumb, and quietly yielded himself to their outrages.

3. "His back" they "tore with scourges," as was foretold by the Psalmist†. "The plowers plowed "upon my back, they made long their furrows." The Jewish council condemned him to death for blasphemy, because he said he was the Son of God. Stoning was the punishment prescribed, by the law of Moses, in such cases‡. But this death was not sufficiently lingering and tormenting to gratify their malice. To glut their insatiable cruelty, they were therefore willing to own their subjection to the Roman power to be so absolute, that it was not lawful for them to put any one to death§, according to their own judicial law; and thus wilfully, though unwittingly, they fulfilled the prophecies. They preferred the punishment which the Romans appropriated to slaves who were guilty of flagitious crimes, and therefore insisted that he should be crucified. According to the Roman custom, those who were crucified, were previously scourged. Thus when they had mocked him, and made him their sport, by putting a crown of thorns on his head, and a reed in his hand for a sceptre, in derision of his kingly office, he was stripped and scourged. It was not unfrequent for the sufferers to expire under the severity and torture of scourging. And we may be certain that Jesus experienced no lenity from their merciless hands. The plowers plowed his back. But more and greater tor-

* 2 Sam. x. 5. † Psal. cxxix. 3.
‡ Lev. xxiv. 16. § John xviii. 31.

He was engaged to make a [illegible] by his sufferings; and as he had [illegible] life, he would not dismiss his spirit, [illegible]. "It is finished."

[illegible] to use the words of Pilate, "Behold the [illegible]" Oh! for a realizing impression of this his [illegible] humiliation and suffering, that we may be duly affected with a sense of his love to sinners, and of the [illegible] of our sins, which rendered it necessary that the surety should thus suffer! Behold "the Lamb of "God," mocked, blind-folded, spit upon, and scourged! Let us add to all this, the consideration of his praying for his tormentors†, and we have an example of perfect magnanimity.

Shall *we* then refuse to suffer shame for *his* sake, and be intimidated, by the frowns or contempt of men, from avowing our attachment to him! Ah! Lord, we are, indeed, capable of this baseness and ingratitude. But, if thou art pleased to strengthen us with the power of thy Spirit, we will account such disgrace our glory. Then we will not hang down our heads and despond, but will rather rejoice and be exceeding glad, if the world revile us and persecute us, and speak all manner of evil against us, provided it be falsely‡, and provided it be for thy sake!

Shall we continue in sin§, after we know what it cost him to expiate our sins? God forbid! When Mark Antony addressed the citizens of Rome, to animate them to revenge the death of Cæsar—he enlarged upon Cæsar's character, his great actions, his love to the Roman people, and the evidence he had given of it, in

* John xix. 5. † Luke xxiii. 34.
‡ Matth. v. 11. § Rom. vi. 1.

s donations and bequests he had appointed them by s will, the particulars of which he specified. When had thus engaged their admiration and gratitude, d they discovered emotions of regret and sensibility, at Cæsar, the greatest character in Rome, who had ught and triumphed for *them*, and had remembered *em* in his will, should be slain, Antony threw aside a th, and showed them his dead body, covered with unds and blood. This sight rendered it needless to y more. The whole assembly united as one man, to arch out and to destroy his murderers. The applition is obvious—May our hearts, from this hour, be led with a determined, invariable resentment against , the procuring cause of the humiliation and death our best Friend and benefactor !

SERMON XIX.

MESSIAH SUFFERING AND WOUNDED FOR US.

ISAIAH liii. 4, 5.

rely he hath borne our grief and carried our sorrows.—He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed.

WHEN our Lord was transfigured, Moses and Elijah peared in glory and conversed with him. Had we en informed of the interview only, we should probably ve desired to know the subject of their conversation, we might reasonably suppose it turned upon very eresting and important topics. The scripture makes le provision for the indulgence of our curiosity, but

omits nothing that is necessary for our instruction; and we learn thus much from it, that they discoursed, not upon the trifling things which the world accounts great, such as the rise and fall of empires; but they spake of the sufferings of Jesus, and of the decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem. They spake of his Exodus*, (as the word is,) his departure out of life, the issue and complexion of his engagement for sinners, that is, his crucifixion and death. This is the grand theme of heaven and heaven-born souls. We lately considered the cruel insults MESSIAH submitted to from the servants in the high priest's hall, and from the Roman soldiers. The passage I have now read leads our meditations to the foot of the cross. May the Holy Spirit realize the scene to our hearts! The cross of Christ displays the divine perfections with peculiar glory. Here the name of God is revealed, as a just God and a Saviour. Here the believer contemplates, in one view, the unspeakable evil of sin, and the unsearchable riches of mercy. This gives him the most affecting sense of the misery which he has deserved, while at the same time he receives the fullest assurance that there is forgiveness with God, and discovers a sure foundation whereon he may build his hope of eternal life, without fear of disappointment. From the moment the apostle Paul was enlightened to understand this mystery of redeeming love, he accounted his former gain but loss; his former supposed wisdom no better than folly, and became determined to know nothing†, to depend upon nothing, to glory in nothing, but Jesus Christ, and him crucified.

A representation of the Redeemer's sufferings, capable of exciting tears and moving the passions, may be made

* Luke ix. 31. † 1 Cor. ii. 2.; Gal. vi. 14.

e powers of oratory; and similar emotions have been produced by a romance or a tragedy, though ubject is known beforehand to be entirely a fiction. ight in the understanding is necessary to convince nfluence the heart. Unless the mind be deeply trated with the *causes* which rendered MESSIAH'S h necessary, the most pathetic description of the will leave the will and affections unchanged. I many of my auditory can assign these causes. have felt yourselves personally concerned in an t which took place long before your birth; and if are asked, Why was Jesus mocked, buffetted, and upon? and why were his enemies permitted to him to the cross? You can answer, "Surely he ath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows"— you can likewise say, "By his stripes we are aled."

ie words lead us to consider the *cause* and the *t*.

The *cause* of the Redeemer's sufferings implied in word "our." He bore the griefs and sorrows which our desert. Such is the language, the confession, grateful acknowledgment of all who believe in his e. They who are delivered by grace from the spirit power of this evil world, and who live by his death, likewise they who see they must perish unless saved im, are authorized to consider him as mindful of a, and making provision for them in the day of his ble. They who were actually healed by looking at brazen serpent according to God's appointment, a sufficient proof in themselves, that it was erected placed in view of the camp* on their account.

* Numb. xxi. 9.

"He bore our griefs."—It does not follow that sinners must have been crucified, if the Saviour had not been crucified on their behalf. But as this was a painful and terrible punishment, it may teach us, that without his interposition we were justly liable to extremity of misery in the present life. That we who have offended God should enjoy health, peace, or satisfaction for a single hour; that we do not draw every breath in the most excruciating pain; that we derive any comfort from creatures; that we are not a burden and a terror to ourselves, and mutually to each other; that our state while upon earth is, in any respect, better than an image of hell,—must wholly be ascribed to him. A sinner, as such, is under the curse of the law; and this curse includes every species of misery that can affect us, either in mind, body, or estate. But *he* was appointed, from the beginning, to sustain and exhaust the curse for us. And therefore the earth, though so long inhabited by wretches in a state of bold rebellion against their Maker, is filled with the fruits and evidences of his long-suffering patience and mercy. Therefore he still affords "us "rain and fruitful seasons*," indulges us with a variety of temporal blessings, and gives us power to take comfort in them. This consideration greatly enhances the value of temporal good things to his people. They receive them as from his hand, as tokens of his love and pledges of his favour, sanctified to their use by his blood and promise. Cheered by such thoughts as these, his poor people often enjoy their plain fare with a pleasure, of which the expensive and dissipated sensualist has no conception. And how does it add to the relish

* Acts xiv. 17.

of all earthly comforts, to think, while we are using them,

> There's not a gift his hand bestows,
> But cost his heart a groan!

So, likewise, the remembrance of what he bore for them alleviates the pressure of all their sufferings, and affords them a ground whereon they may rejoice, "yea, "glory in tribulation* also."

But his crucifixion, and the whole of his sufferings from wicked men, cannot give us a just idea of what he endured for us. Grievous as they were, considered in themselves they were light if compared with the agonies of his soul. These extorted the blood from his body†, before the hand of man touched him. And when he uttered his most dolorous cry upon the cross, it was not for the anguish of his bodily wounds, but his soul felt, for a season, a separation from the presence and comforts of God. Therefore he said, "Why hast thou forsaken "me‡?" It is true, his holy nature was not capable of some part of the impenitent sinner's portion. Remorse of conscience, the stings of the never-dying worm, and the horrors and rage of despair, could not touch him, who had no personal sin, and whose love and faith were always perfect. But a sword pierced his soul: and it pleased the Father not only to permit him to be bruised by the cruelty of his enemies, but to bruise him himself§.

The ground of all this was laid in his voluntary substitution of himself, from before the foundation of the world, to obey and suffer in behalf of his people. This

* Rom. v. 3.
† Luke xxii. 44.
‡ Matth. xxvii. 46.
§ Isa. liii. 10.

"gave his back to the smiters, his cheeks to them that "plucked off the hair; he hid not his face from shame "and spitting."

II. But are we reading a prophecy, or the history of his extreme humiliation? It is a prophecy; how literally and exactly it was fulfilled, we learn from his history by the evangelists. With what cruelty, with what contempt, was he treated, first by the servants in the hall of the high priest, afterwards by the Roman soldiers! Let us consider him, "who endured the "contradiction of sinners against himself*." These words of the apostle suggest some preliminary observations, to prepare our minds for receiving a due impression from the several particulars here mentioned.

When the apostle would dispose believers by an argument or motive, (which, if we fully understood it, would render all other arguments unnecessary,) to endure sufferings and crosses patiently; he says, "Con-"sider him"—he uses a word which is properly a mathematical term, denoting the ratio or proportion between different numbers, or figures, *q. d.* Compare yourselves with him, and his sufferings with your own. Consider who he is, no less than what he endured.

In the apprehensions of men, insults are aggravated in proportion to the disparity between the person who receives and who offers them. A blow from an equal is an offence, but would be still more deeply resented from an inferior. But if a subject, a servant, a slave, should presume to strike a king, it would justly be deemed an enormous crime. But Jesus, the King of kings, and Lord of lords, whom all the angels of God worship, made himself so entirely of no reputation, that

* Heb. xii. 3.

the basest of the people, the servants, the common soldiers, were not afraid to make him the object of their derision, and to express their hatred in the most sarcastic and contemptuous manner. It is said, that he endured the contradiction of "sinners." So, perhaps, do we; but we are sinners likewise, and deserve much more than we suffer, if not immediately from the instruments of our grief, yet from the Lord, who has a right to employ what instruments he pleases to afflict us for our sins. This thought quieted the spirit of David, when his own son rose up against his life, and his own servant cursed him to his face*. But Jesus was holy, harmless, and undefiled, he had done nothing amiss; yet the usage he met with was such as has seldom been offered to the vilest malefactor. Their cruel and scornful contradiction was likewise expressly and directly against "himself;" whereas his people only suffer from unreasonable and wicked men, for his sake, and for their professed attachment to "him." In the most violent persecutions, they who could be prevailed on to renounce his name and his cause, usually escaped punishment, and were frequently favoured and rewarded. And this is still the ground of the world's displeasure; fierce and bitter as their opposition may seem, the way to reconciliation is always open; they are not angry with us further than we avow a dependence upon him, and show ourselves determined to obey him rather than men. If we could forsake him, their resentment would be disarmed, for they mean no more than to intimidate us from his service. I do not think that they who make peace with the world upon these

* 2 Sam. xvi. 11.

God. It properly signifies here, a punishment for instruction or example. Punishments are inflicted, either for the correction of an offender, or for the prevention of evil, or for example to others. The two former reasons could not apply to our Lord. He had committed no evil; he was perfect before, and in suffering. But standing in the place of sinners, and engaged to expiate their offences, he was made a public example of the misery and distress which sin demerited. Thus justice was vindicated in the exercise of mercy; and sinners believing in his name, are exempted from punishment, for his sake, in a way which affords not the least encouragement or extenuation to sin. And thus our peace is procured.

II. The effect of his sufferings for sins not his own. "He bore our griefs, and carried our sorrows;" he was wounded and bruised for us; "the chastisement of our "peace was upon him," that "by his stripes we may "be healed." The Hebrew word here, and the Greek word the apostle Peter uses in his quotation of this passage, which we render "stripes*," is properly the mark which stripes or wounds leave upon the body, or, as we say, *scars*. The scars in his hands, feet, and side, and perhaps other marks of his many wounds, remained after his resurrection. And John saw him in vision, before the throne, as a lamb that had been slain. All these expressions and representations, I apprehend, are designed to intimate to us, that though the death of MESSIAH is an event long since past, yet the effects and benefits are ever new, and to the eye of faith are ever present. How admirable is this expedient, that the wounds of one, yea, of millions, should be healed,

* 1 Pet. ii. 24.

by beholding the wounds of another! Yet this is the language of the Gospel, Look and live. "Look unto "me, and be ye saved." Three great wounds are ours, guilt, sin, and sorrow; but by contemplating his weals or scars with an enlightened eye, and by rightly understanding who was thus wounded, and why all these wounds are healed.

You who live by this medicine speak well of it. Tell to others, as you have opportunity, what a Saviour you have found. It is usual for those who have been relieved, in dangerous and complicated diseases, by a skilful physician, to commend him to others who are labouring under the like maladies. We often see public acknowledgments to this purpose. If all the persons who have felt the efficacy of a dying Saviour's wounds apprehended by faith, were to publish their cases, how greatly would his power and grace be displayed! They are all upon record, and will all be known in the great day of his appearing. Some of them are occasionally published, and may be read in our own tongue. And though they are not all related with equal judgment, nor attended with circumstances equally striking; yet there is a sufficiency, in this way, to leave the world without excuse. Not to mention modern accounts of this kind, (though many might be mentioned which are indisputably true, and superior to the cavils of gainsayers,) the Confessions of Austin may be appealed to, as a proof that the Gospel is not a system of notions only, but has a mighty power to enlighten the bewildered mind, to subdue the obstinate will, to weaken the force of long-confirmed habits of evil, to relieve from distressing fears, and to effect a real, universal, permanent, and beneficial change of sentiment and conduct, such as no similar instance can be

found, in the history of mankind, to have been produced by any other principles. But if you are a true Christian, in the circle of your connexions you will sometimes have a fair opportunity of giving a reason of the hope that is in you. Pray for grace and wisdom to improve such seasons; and if you speak the truth in simplicity and love, you know not but the Lord may give his blessing to your testimony, and honour you as an instrument of good. And to convert one sinner from the error of his way, is an event of greater importance, than the deliverance of a whole kingdom from temporal evil.

Yet, remember, if you espouse this cause, a certain consistency of character will be expected from you, without which you had better be silent, than speak in its defence, or profess yourself a sharer in the privileges of the Gospel. There are too many persons who treat the great truths we profess, as mere opinions, points of speculation which form the Shibboleth of a party: there are others, who think an attachment to them a sure sign of an enthusiastic, deluded imagination: and there are others, again, who misrepresent them as unfavourable to morality, and affording a cloak and encouragement to licentiousness. Beware, lest, by an improper conduct, you lay stumbling-blocks in the way of the blind, strengthen the prejudices of the ignorant, and give weight to the calumnies of the malicious. The people of the world are quick-sighted to the faults of religious professors; and though they affect to despise their principles, they are tolerable judges what that conversation is, which only these principles can produce, and always expect it from those who avow them. They will make allowances for others, and admit human infirmity as a plea for their faults, but they will not ex-

tend their candour to you. If your zeal for the truth, and your regular attendance upon the ministers who preach it, are not accompanied with a spirit of humility, integrity, and benevolence; if you are passionate, peevish, discontented, censorious, or proud; if they observe that you are greedy of gain, penurious, close-fisted, or hard-hearted; or even if you comply with their customs and spirit, mingle with them in their amusements, and do not maintain a noble singularity, by avoiding every appearance of evil; they will not only despise *you* in their hearts, but they will take the occasion of despising and speaking evil of the truth itself on your account. But if you are all of a piece, and are truly solicitous to adorn your profession, by walking agreeable to the rules of the Gospel, and filling up your relations in life to the glory of God, and the good of your fellow-creatures; by thus "well-doing, "you will put to silence the ignorance of foolish men*," and in a great measure stop their mouths, if you cannot change their hearts. And though they may affect to rail at you, or to ridicule you, they will be constrained to feel a secret reverence for you in their consciences.

But are there any hearts of stone amongst us, who are still unaffected by the love and sufferings of the Son of God; who are still crucifying him afresh, and living in sin, though they hear and know what it cost him to make an atonement for sin? Yet now hear—now look—Behold the Lamb of God! The Lord in mercy open the eyes of your mind. I address you once more. I once more conjure you, by his agony and bloody sweat, by his passion, cross, and death, to seek to him that your souls may live. Can you be proof against

* 1 Pet. ii. 15.

these arguments? Nay, then, should you live and die thus obstinate, you must perish indeed!

SERMON XX.

SIN CHARGED UPON THE SURETY.

ISAIAH liii. 6.

All we like sheep have gone astray: we have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord hath laid upon him the iniquity of us all.

COMPARISONS, in the Scripture, are frequently to be understood with great limitation: perhaps, out of many circumstances, one only is justly applicable to the case. Thus, when our Lord says, "Behold I come "as a thief*,"—common sense will fix the resemblance to a single point, that he will come suddenly, and unexpected. So when wandering sinners are compared to wandering sheep, we have a striking image of the danger of their state, and of their inability to recover themselves. Sheep, wandering without a shepherd, are exposed, a defenceless and easy prey, to wild beasts and enemies, and liable to perish for want of pasture; for they are not able either to provide for themselves, or to find the way back to the place from whence they strayed. Whatever they suffer, they continue to wander, and if not sought out, will be lost. Thus far the allusion holds. But sheep, in such a situation, are not the subjects of blame. They would be highly blameable, if

* Rev. xvi. 15.

we could suppose them rational creatures; if they had been under the eye of a careful and provident shepherd, had been capable of knowing him, had wilfully and obstinately renounced his protection and guidance, and voluntarily chosen to plunge themselves into danger, rather than to remain with him any longer. Thus it is with man. His wandering is rebellious. God made him "upright," but he has "sought out" to himself "many inventions*." God has appointed for mankind a safe and pleasant path, by walking in which they shall find rest to their souls; but they say, "We will "not walk therein†." They were capable of knowing the consequences of going astray, were repeatedly warned of them, were fenced in by wise and good laws, which they presumptuously broke through. And when they had wandered from him, they were again and again invited to return to him, but they refused. They mocked his messages and his messengers, and preferred the misery they had brought upon themselves, to the happiness of being under his direction and care. Surely he emphatically deserves the name of the Good Shepherd, who freely laid down his life to restore sheep of this character!

My text, therefore, expresses the sentiment of those, and of those only, who are acquainted with the misery of our fallen state, feel their own concern in it, and approve of the method which God has provided for their deliverance and recovery. It contains a confession of their own guilt, and an acknowledgment of his mercy.

I. A confession of guilt and wretchedness. Sin has deprived us both of the knowledge and presence of God. In consequence of this, we wander, every one

* Eccles. vii, 29. † Jer. vi. 16.

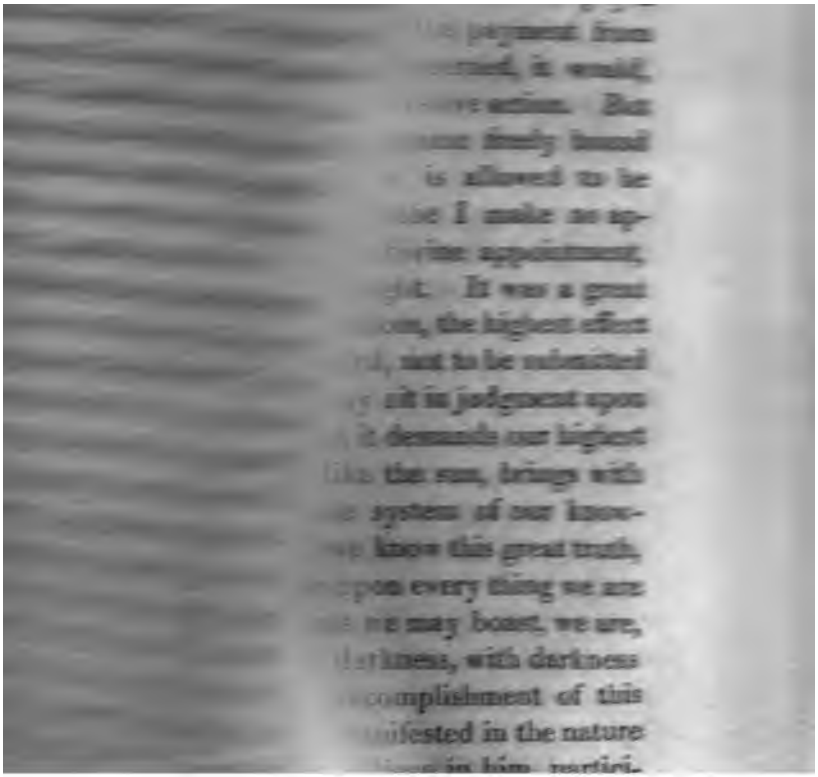
to his own way. All are under the power of sin, and all equally strangers to the paths of peace and safety. The paths which sinners choose for themselves are diverse from each other, as inclination or circumstances vary; but, however different in appearance, if persisted in, they terminate at last in the same point. They all lead to destruction. We may observe on this head,

1. It is a sufficient proof of our depravity, that we prefer our own ways to the Lord's; nor can he inflict a heavier judgment upon us in this life, than to give us up entirely to the way of our own hearts. He made us to be happy; but as he made us for himself, and gave us a capacity, and a vastness of desire, which only he himself can satisfy, the very constitution and frame of our nature render happiness impossible to us, unless in a way of dependence upon him, and obedience to his laws. The lamb that grazes in the meadow, and the fish that swims in the stream, are each in their proper element. If you suppose them to change places they must both perish. But the brute creation have no propensity to such changes as would destroy them. The instincts implanted in them by their great Creator are conducive to their welfare; and to these instincts they are uniformly faithful. If you can conceive of beasts impatient to leave the shore, and improve their situation by rushing into the ocean; and the fishes equally earnest to forsake the waters, in quest of new and greater advantages upon the dry land; it may illustrate the folly of fallen man, who, turned aside by a deceived heart, refuses life, and seeks death in the error of his ways. For the will of God, (if I may so speak,) is our proper element; and if we depart from it, our sin unavoidably involves our punishment. We naturally indulge hard thoughts of God, and think the rule he has

enjoined us [illegible] us from real [illegible] known advantages [illegible] persuaded Eve [illegible] we know that [illegible] ment, we rashly [illegible] assures us that the ways of God are pleasant, but we will not be persuaded. Experience proves that the way of transgressors is hard, but we resist the conviction, and hurry on in a round of continual disappointment. Are the proud, the covetous, the voluptuous, or the ambitious, happy? I appeal to conscience.

2. There is only one right way, but a thousand ways of being wrong. If you are not following him who has said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life*," you are wandering, you are far from God; for none can come to the Father but by him; and far from peace; for there can be no true peace in the mind unless he bestows and maintains it. The profane and the self-righteous, the open sinner and the hypocrite, the lover of pleasure and the lover of gold, the formal Papist and the formal Protestant, though they seem to travel different roads, though they pity or censure each other, will meet at last, (unless the grace of God prevent,) in the same state of final and hopeless misery. It is grievous to a spiritual and benevolent mind, to see those who are all wrong disputing among themselves which of them is right. Each one is ready to think himself wise, if the folly in which he allows himself be not precisely of the same kind with that which he condemns [illegible] neighbour. But the Scripture is the invariab[illegible]

* John xiv. 6.



which it is your duty and interest to be conformed now; for it is given by the inspiration and authority of God, and is the standard by which you must be judged at last. Whatever character you bear amongst men, if you have not faith and holiness, you certainly are not in the way of life. For it is written, "He that be-"lieveth not, shall be damned*;" and again, it is written, "Without holiness, no man shall see the Lord†."

3. As wandering sheep are liable to innumerable dangers which they can neither foresee nor prevent, such is our condition, until, by the power of the Holy Spirit, we are stopped, and turned, and brought into the fold of the good Shepherd. Oh! the misery of man while living without God in the world! He is exposed every hour to the stroke of death, which would at once separate him from all that he loves, and plunge him into the pit, from whence there is no redemption. And at present he is perpetually harassed with cares and fears, with wants and woes, without guidance or refuge; and yet so blinded as to think himself safe, and that his crooked wandering ways will lead him to happiness!

II. An acknowledgment of mercy. Where sin abounded, grace has much more abounded. Man sinned, and MESSIAH suffered. "The Lord hath laid," or caused to meet upon him, "the iniquity of us all," that is, the punishment due to them. The evils we had deserved were in pursuit of us; but Jesus interposed, and they all seized upon him; and he endured them, that we might be spared. Do we ask, upon what

* Mark. xvi. 16. † Heb. xii. 14.

grounds? It was on the ground of his voluntary substitution for sinners, as their covenant-head and representative.

So much, correspondent to this appointment, obtains amongst men, as may show that the idea accords with our notion of Justice. If a man be unable to pay a debt, and the creditor should exact the payment from a third person who was no way concerned, it would, with reason, be deemed a very oppressive action. But if it be known that this person became freely bound and responsible for the debtor, he is allowed to be justly liable. But in the present case I make no appeal to human customs. It is a divine appointment, and therefore is and must be right. It was a great design, the triumph of infinite wisdom, the highest effect of the love of God. It is revealed, not to be submitted to our discussion, or that we may sit in judgment upon the propriety of the measure, but it demands our highest admiration and praise; and, like the sun, brings with that light by which the whole system of our knowdge is illuminated. For till we know this great truth, d are able to see its influence upon every thing we are ated to, whatever attainments we may boast, we are, act, encompassed with thick darkness, with darkness ch may be felt. For the accomplishment of this gn, the Son of God was so manifested in the nature an, that he, and they who believe in him, partici- in a real, though mystical union, and are consi- as one: he their living head; they his body, con- of many members: each of them represented by accepted in him, and deriving from his fulness fe, their light, their strength, and their joy.

He was thus appointed and constituted before the egan, according to the holy counsel and cove-

nant settled from everlasting* for the redemption of sinners. For the fall of man, which rendered his interposition necessary, was not an unexpected contingency; but was foreseen and provided for before man was created upon the earth, yea, before the foundations of the earth were laid.

2. After man had sinned, this glorious Head and Surety made known the certainty and benefit of his mediation and engagement on the behalf of sinners, according to the good pleasure of his wisdom, and as the case required; otherwise, upon the entrance of sin, the full execution of the sentence of the law denounced against the offenders, might perhaps have immediately followed: but he revealed himself. He showed mercy to Adam, covenanted with Noah, walked with Abraham, conversed with Moses, dwelt with his church in the wilderness, and was known by the name of the "Holy one of Israel†." David ascribes to the Shepherd of Israel the name of Jehovah, and Isaiah declares, that the Lord of Hosts is the Husband of the church. These characters of Shepherd, and Bridegroom, and Husband, are appropriated to MESSIAH in the New Testament. He therefore is Jehovah, the Lord of Hosts, whom Abraham, David, and Isaiah, worshipped; or his appearance upon earth would be evidently to the disadvantage of those who believe in him. If he were not God, he would be a creature, for there is no medium; and consequently our Shepherd would be infinitely inferior to the Almighty Shepherd, who was the refuge, the trust, and the salvation of his people, before MESSIAH was manifested in the flesh.

3. In the fulness of time he veiled his glory. He

* Prov. viii. 31.; Tit. i. 2. † Isa. liv. 5.; Psal. xxiii. 1.

"who was in the form of God, and thought it not rob-
"bery to be equal with God, took upon him the form
"of a servant, and was made of a woman, made under
"the law*." Then the union between him and the people whom he came into the world to save was completed; because "the children were partakers of flesh "and blood, he likewise took part of the same†." "The Word, who in the beginning was God, and was "with God, was made flesh‡." And in our nature, though he knew no sin, he was treated as a sinner for us, to declare the righteousness of God, in his forbearance and goodness to all who had been saved in former ages, and in the forgiveness and salvation of all who should trust in him to the end of time. He suffered "once," once for all, "the just for the unjust, to bring "us to God." And now God is revealed, not only as merciful, but as just, "in justifying him which believeth "in Jesus." God is well pleased in him, and for his sake, with all who accept him. Their sins are expiated by his sufferings§; and his perfect righteousness, the whole of his obedience unto death, is the consideration or ground on which they are accounted righteous.

By virtue of this union likewise he is their life. They receive of his fulness, as the branches‖ derive their life and fruitfulness from the tree whereon they grow; therefore the apostle said, "I live, yet not I, but Christ "liveth in me**." This is the great mystery of Christianity, which words alone cannot explain: it is a divine appointment, hidden from those who are wise and prudent in their own sight, but revealed to all who, with the simplicity of children, are desirous of being

* Phil. ii. 6, 7. † Heb. ii. 14. ‡ John i. 1.
§ Rom. iv. 6.; Jer. xxiii. 6. ‖ John xv. 1. ** Gal. ii. 20.

taught of God, and wait patiently upon him, in the use of his prescribed means, for the light and influence of his Holy Spirit.

From this subject, the substitution of MESSIAH for sinners, we may learn,

1. How to estimate the evil of sin. That sin is a great evil, is evident by its effects. It deprived Adam of the life and presence of God, and brought death and all natural evil into the world. It caused the destruction of the old world by water. It is the source of all the misery with which the earth is now filled; it will kindle the last great conflagration; yea, it has already kindled that fire which shall never be quenched. But in no view does the sinfulness of sin appear so striking as in this wonderful effect,—the suffering and death of MESSIAH: that notwithstanding the dignity of his person, and the perfection of his obedience to the law, and that though he prayed in his agonies, "that if it were "possible the cup might pass from him*," yet, if sinners were to be saved, it was indispensably necessary that he should drink it. This shows the evil of sin in the strongest light; and in this light it is viewed by all who derive life from his death, and healing from his wounds. We may be afraid of the consequences of sin from other considerations; but it is only by looking to him who was pierced† for our transgressions, that we can learn to hate it.

2. The complete justification of those who believe in him. They are‡ delivered from all condemnation. Every charge against them is over-ruled by this plea, that "Christ has died, and is risen" on their behalf, "and ever liveth to make intercession for them." And

* Luke xxii. 42. † Zech. xii. 10. ‡ Rom. viii. 1.

though they are still in a state of discipline, for the mortification of sin yet remaining in them; and though, for the trial, exercise, and growth of their faith, it is still needful that they pass through many tribulations; yet none of these are strictly and properly penal. They are not the tokens of God's displeasure, but fatherly chastisements, and tokens of his love, designed to promote the work of grace in their hearts, and to make them partakers of his holiness*. Though necessary at present, they will not be necessary long; and therefore the hour is at hand when all tears shall be wiped away from their eyes, and they shall weep no more. His true servants, in the midst of the storms by which they are tossed on the tempestuous sea of this life, are no less safe, and, notwithstanding their imperfections, are no less beloved, than those who have already escaped out of the reach of every evil, and are now before the throne.

3. The reason why believers are not wearied, nor overpowered, by all the difficulties of their service, nor by all the arts and efforts of their enemies. They are one with Christ. He who has all power in heaven and in earth is engaged for their support. When they faint, he revives them; when they are wounded, he heals them; when their foot slippeth, he upholdeth them. He has said, "because I live, ye shall live also." Therefore, who can prevail against them, when their "life is hidden with Christ in God†?" And further, the knowledge of their Saviour's love, and of the holy, awful, yet amiable and endearing, character of God displayed in his mediation, is the source of their love, gratitude, and cheerful obedience. It is this makes

* Heb. xii. 6—11. † Col. iii. 3.

hard things easy, and bitter things sweet. "The love "of Christ constraineth them*." They look to him and are enlightened. And when they consider who he is, in what way, and at what a price, he redeemed them, and what he has prepared for them; when they attend to his gracious word, "Fear none of those things which "thou shalt suffer: be thou faithful unto death, and I "will give thee a crown of life†:" they, out of weakness, are made strong; they are inspired with fresh courage; they take up their cross with cheerfulness, and can adopt the language of the apostle, "None of "these things move me, neither count I my life dear, "so that I may finish my course with joy‡."

SERMON XXI.

MESSIAH DERIDED UPON THE CROSS.

PSALM xxii. 7, 8.

All they that see me, laugh me to scorn; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the Lord, that he would deliver him; let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him.

FALLEN man, though alienated from the life of God and degraded, with respect to many of his propensities and pursuits, to a level with the beasts that perish, is not wholly destitute of kind and compassionate feelings towards his fellow-creatures. While self-interest does not interfere, and the bitter passions of envy, hatred, malice, and revenge, are not roused into exercise, he

* 2 Cor. v. 14. † Rev. ii. 10. ‡ Acts xx. 24.

has a degree of instinctive sympathy with them in their sufferings, and a disposition to assist them if he can do it without much detriment to himself. The source of these social feelings we express by the term *humanity*; which seems to imply a consciousness that they properly belong to our nature, and that we *ought*, at least to be always and universally affected in this manner, when occasions offer. But while the heart is under the government of self, our humanity is very partial and limited; and it is to be ascribed to the goodness of God, rather than to any real goodness in man, that it is not wholly extinguished. Were this the case, and were the native evils of the heart left to exert themselves in their full strength and without control, earth would be the very image of hell, and there could be no such thing as society. But, to prevent things from running into utter confusion, God mercifully preserves in mankind some social dispositions. They are, however, so weak in themselves, so powerfully counteracted by the stronger principles of our depravity, and so frequently suppressed by obstinate habits of wickedness, that, in the present state of things, we may almost as justly define man, (whatever impropriety there may seem in the expression,) by saying, *He is an inhuman creature*, as by ascribing to him the benevolent properties of *humanity*.

The rage, cruelty, and savage insensibility, with which sin and Satan have poisoned our nature, never appear in so strong a light as when they assume a religious form; when ignorance, bigotry, and blind zeal, oppose the will and grace of God, under a pretence of doing him service. By this infatuation, every hateful passion is sanctified, and every feeling of humanity stifled. Thus, though the sufferings of the most atrocious malefactors usually excite pity in the spectators, and often draw tears from their

eyes; yet the agonies of God's persecuted servants, under the most exquisite tortures which malice could invent, have frequently raised no other emotions than those of derision and scorn. My text leads us to consider the highest instance of this kind. The 22d Psalm undoubtedly refers to MESSIAH. It begins with the very words which he uttered upon the cross; nor could David speak of himself, when he said, "They pierced "my hands and my feet." *He* was God's servant in the most eminent sense; and the service he performed, was an uninterrupted course of benevolence to the souls and bodies of men. He spent his life in "going about doing "good*;" nor could his enemies fix a single stain upon his conduct. Yet they thirsted for his blood; and, because he came into the world to save sinners, they accomplished their cruel designs. We have already seen how he was treated by the servants and by the soldiers, when condemned by the Jewish council, and by the Roman governor. This prophecy was fulfilled when he hung upon the cross. There have been persons in our own days, whose crimes have excited such detestation, that the populace would probably have torn them in pieces, before and even after their trial, if they could have had them in their power.—Yet, when these very obnoxious persons have been executed according to their sentence, if, perhaps, there was not one spectator who wished them to escape, yet, neither was one found so lost to sensibility, as to insult them in their dying moments. But when Jesus suffers, "all that see him, "laugh him to scorn; they shoot out the lip, they shake "the head;" they insult his character, and his hope. The evangelists furnish us with an affecting comment upon

* Acts x. 38.

this passage. They inform us by whom he was thus scorned and derided; they mention some circumstances, which strongly mark the peculiar and excessive contempt with which he was treated; and they take notice of the especial scope and object of their insults, namely, the gracious purpose he had often expressed towards sinners, and the strong confidence he had avowed in God his Father.

I. The persons who scorned and derided him, were various, and of different characters.

1. The chief priests, elders, and rulers of the people. When these, who were held in ignorant admiration by the multitude, set the example, we do not wonder that it was generally followed. They had been his most avowed and determined enemies; they had long conspired to take away his life, and in the appointed hour their plots were permitted to succeed. They now rejoiced in their success. By their office, as teachers and expounders of the law, they ought to have pointed him out to the people as the object of their reverence and hope; but, having rejected him themselves, they employed all their authority and influence to make him the object of general contempt. And, lest the extremity of his torments should awaken sentiments of commiseration in the multitude, they were the first, and the loudest, in reviling him as he hung upon the cross.

2. The populace derided him. They had been instigated by the priests to demand his death of Pilate, when he was desirous of dismissing him, and rather to insist that Barabbas should be spared*. The populace, though no less ignorant, were less malicious than their leaders.

* Matth. xxvii. 20.

At different times, when they heard his public discourses, and saw his wonderful works, they had been staggered, and constrained to say, "Is not this the son of David?" and not many days before the popular cry had been strongly in his favour*; though quickly after it was, "Cru-"cify him, crucify him†." As the sea, though sometimes smooth, is always disposed to obey the impulse of the wind; so the common people, though easily roused to oppose the truth, would perhaps be quiet, if they were left to themselves; but there are seldom wanting artful and designing men, who, by a pretended regard for religion, and by misrepresentations, work upon their passions and prejudices, and stir them up to a compliance with their purposes. The priests by degrees wrought the populace up, first to reject MESSIAH, and then to join their leaders in mocking and deriding him.

3. The Roman soldiers, who had contemptuously clothed him with a scarlet robe, and bowed the knee before him in derision, continued to mock him when hanging upon the cross. The Romans, to whom many monarchies were become subject and tributary, affected to despise the name of king; and they held the Jewish nation in peculiar contempt. The title, therefore, of King of the Jews, affixed to his cross, afforded them a subject for the keenest sarcasm.

4. Yea, such is the hardness of the human heart, that one of the malefactors‡, who was crucified by his side, unaffected with his own guilt, and insensible of the just judgment of God, and of the account he was soon to render at his awful tribunal, seemed to seek some relief, in the midst of his agonies, by joining with the priests and people in railing on the innocent Jesus, who was

* Matth. xxi. 10, 11. † Luke xxiii. 21. ‡ Luke xxiii. 39.

suffering before his eyes. Thus he was the object of universal derision. They who were at the greatest distance in character and sentiment, who differed from, despised and hated each other, on other accounts, united as one man, in expressing every possible mark of hatred and scorn against him who had done nothing amiss.

II. They showed their scorn in the most pointed and cruel manner. Not only they who had clamoured for his death derided him, but others who were only passing by upon their ordinary occasions, could not pass on till they had stopped a while to insult him, wagging their heads, and reminding him of what he had formerly said, and charging him with the supposed folly and arrogance of his claims. They jested upon his wants; when he said, "I thirst," they gave him vinegar to drink, mingled with gall. They jested upon his words: when he uttered his dolorous complaint, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani, "My God, my God, why hast thou for forsaken me?" some of them, with a malicious turn, (which possibly was applauded for wit by others,) from the sound of the beginning of the sentence, took occasion to suggest, that by saying, "Eli, Eli," he called for Elias, the prophet, to come to his assistance. Alas! of what dreadful malignity and obduracy is the heart of man capable! How may we conceive the heavenly hosts to have been affected with this scene, when they beheld their Lord, the object of their worship and supreme love, thus treated by sinners? But it behooved him thus to suffer*; for he had undertaken to expiate the sins of many of his murderers, and to offer such satisfaction to the justice and law of God, as might render it consistent with his holiness and truth, to pardon the vilest offenders who should

* Luke xxiv. 26.

trust in his name, in all future ages. Therefore there was no voice, arrest, or interposition from the heavenly world—thus he must be tormented, thus he must be scorned and suspended as a spectacle to angels and to men, till he had paid the full price of redemption, and could say, "It is finished." Then, and not till then, he bowed his head, and breathed out his spirit into his Father's hands. There were, however, attestations to his dignity, in this his lowest state. He showed, by his gracious answer to the penitent malefactor, that he had still authority upon earth to forgive sin, and to save to the uttermost; and the sun withdrew his light, and the rocks rent, though daring sinners derided and mocked.

III. The bulk of the people bore their part in this tragedy through precipitation and ignorance. In his prayer for their forgiveness, (a prayer which was signally answered after his ascension,) he mentioned the only extenuation their wickedness could possibly admit, They knew not what they did. It was otherwise with those who were principally concerned in procuring his death. Long before, when they could not deny the reality of his miracles, they ascribed them to the agency of Beelzebub. By this malicious, wilful opposition to the strongest evidence of fact, against the conviction of their own minds, and by their violent determined rejection of his mission, they committed the unpardonable sin. They spoke and sinned against the Holy Spirit. This sin no one can have committed, while he is fearful lest he has committed it; for it essentially consists in a deliberate and wilful refusal of the only means of salvation. It is the sign of final, absolute impenitence. They who had thus *ascribed* his miracles to Beelzebub, expressed the same

height of enlightened malice against him in his dying agonies, and there was a poignancy in their insults, of which the ignorant multitude were not capable.

1. They reproached his great design for which he came into the world: "He saved others, himself he "cannot save*." How different is the force of the same words, according to the intention of the speaker! When they said, "His blood be upon us, and upon "our children†!" they spoke the very language of the hearts of those who love him, and who derive all their hopes, and all their happiness, from the application of his blood to their consciences. But, to themselves, it proved the most dreadful imprecation. So, it will be the grateful acknowledgment of his people in time and to eternity, that when he was resolved to save *them*, the difficulties in the way were so great, that neither his prayers, nor his tears, nor his unspotted innocence, could prevail to save *himself*. But for this, his love to sinners, his enemies reviled him. Nor would they have offered to believe, if he would come down from the cross, had they supposed there was the least probability of such an event; for they had often rejected evidence equal to what they now demanded.

2. They reproached him for his trust and confidence in God. He had said, that "God was his own Fa-"ther‡:" and they understood him to use the expression in so high a sense, as thereby to make himself equal with God. Had they misunderstood him, had he not really intended what they laid to his charge, surely he would have explained himself. This was the very ground of their proceeding against him before the council, and the formal reason of the sentence of death they

* Matth. xxvii. 42. † Matth. xxvii. 25. ‡ John v. 18. &c.

pronounced against him. How often did he appeal to the testimony of the Scriptures, and of John, whom they durst not but acknowledge to have been a prophet, and to his own mighty works, in support of his claim? But having fastened him upon the cross, they triumphed, and unwittingly expressed their exultation, in the very words which David had foretold should be used to MESSIAH. So exactly were the Scriptures fulfilled by those who used their utmost endeavours to evade them, and to prevent their accomplishment.

But what is all this to us? It is very much to us. Christ could suffer but once, yet we read of those "who crucify him afresh." His Gospel represents his personal ministry, declares his character, reveals his love, produces the same effects in those who receive it, and they who oppose it are considered as opposing him, and are influenced by the same spirit which instigated the unbelieving Jews. It is to be hoped that many reject and scorn it, as the multitude did of old, through ignorance; and that the intercession of him, who prayed for those that knew not what they did, will prevail for their conversion. Whenever their eyes are opened, "they will be pricked to the heart*," and will then gladly inquire of those whom now they despise, What they must do to be saved? But it is to be feared, there are in Christian countries many persons who too nearly resemble the spirit and conduct of the Jewish rulers; whose opposition proceeds from rooted enmity to the truth, persisted in against light that has sometimes forced upon their minds, and who, though convinced, will not be persuaded. They who despise, calumniate, and scorn the believers of the Gospel, would

* Acts ii. 37.

certainly offer the like treatment to the Author of it, if he was within their reach. They are ill-treated for his sake, and he considers it as an affront to himself. Thus he said to Saul of Tarsus, when breathing out threatenings against his disciples, "Why persecutest thou "me?" They who reject his ministers, reject him*. They who speak disdainfully of his dying himself to save others; they who reproach or ridicule the humble confidence of his people; who censure and revile their hopes and comforts derived from his good word, as enthusiasm or hypocrisy; who have no compassion for their distresses, but rather wound them as with a sword in their bones, saying unto them, "Where is now your "God†?" are certainly treading, if not altogether with equal vehemence, in the footsteps of the Jewish rulers. —May the Lord in mercy show them the danger of their path, and give them a timely apprehension of the destruction to which it leads! That they may humble themselves to his will, implore his pardon, espouse his cause, and experience the comforts and privileges of that Gospel which they have hitherto reviled and scorned.

* Luke x. 16. † Psalm cxv. 2.

SERMON XXII.

MESSIAH UNPITIED, AND WITHOUT COMFORTER.

PSAL. lxix. 20.

Reproach [Rebuke] *hath broken my heart, and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none.*

THE greatness of suffering cannot be certainly estimated by the single consideration of the immediate apparent cause; the impression it actually makes upon the mind of the sufferer must likewise be taken into the account. That which is a heavy trial to one person, may to another be much lighter, and perhaps no trial at all. And a state of outward prosperity, in which the eye of a by-stander can see nothing wanting to happiness, may be, and I doubt not often is, a state of torment to the possessor. On the other hand, we know that the consolations with which it has sometimes pleased God to cheer his suffering servants, have enabled them to rejoice in the greatest extremities. They have triumphed upon the rack, and while their flesh was consuming by the fire. The Lord has had many followers, who, for his sake, have endured scourgings, and tortures, and terrible deaths, not only without reluctance or dismay, but without a groan. But he himself was terrified, amazed, and filled with anguish, when he suffered for us. Shall we say, The disciples, in such cases, have been superior to their Master; when yet they acknowledged that they derived all their *strength* and resolution from him! This difference

cannot be well accounted for by those who deny that his sufferings were a proper atonement for sin, and who can see no other reason for his death, than that by dying he was to seal the truth of his doctrine, and to propose himself to us as an example of constancy and patience. But the great aggravation of MESSIAH's sufferings, was the suspension of those divine supports which enable his people to endure the severest afflictions to which he calls them. Perhaps some persons who acknowledge our Lord's true character, may, upon that ground, think his agonies less insupportable, since he was not a mere man, but God in the human nature. It was, indeed, the dignity of his person, that gave influence and efficacy to all that he did and suffered for sinners. It is likewise true, that the weight laid upon him was more than any mere creature could sustain. I would speak with reverence and reserve upon a point which is too high for our weak minds fully to comprehend. But in whatever way the nature of man, which he assumed, was upheld by his eternal power and Godhead, we may venture to affirm, that he derived no sensible comfort from it. For we have his own testimony, that in this sense "God had forsaken him." The divine nature could neither bleed nor suffer. He was truly and properly a man; and as a man he suffered, and he suffered alone. Many of his servants have rejoiced while they were tormented, because God overbalanced all they felt with the light of his countenance; but the Saviour himself, deprived of this light, experienced, to the uttermost, all that sin deserved, that was not inconsistent with the perfection of his character. My text expresses, so far as human words and ideas can reach, his exquisite distress, when "he bore "our sins in his own body, upon the tree: Reproach

"broke his heart, and when he looked for pity and "comfort, he found none."

1. "Reproach hath broken my heart." We must not confine our thoughts here to the reproach of his enemies. The passage in the *Messiah* expresses it agreeably to the version of the Psalms used in our Liturgy, "Thy rebuke." Though "he knew no sin, "he was made sin for us." He was accounted and treated as a sinner. Now a sinner is deservedly the greatest object of contempt in the universe, and indeed the only object of deserved contempt. Thus he incurred the reproach of the law and justice of God.—The Holy Father, viewing the Son of his love in this light, as charged with the sins of his people, forsook him. God infinitely hates sin, and will have no fellowship with it; and of this he gave the most awful proof, by forsaking his beloved Son, when he took upon him to answer for the sins of men. Then the sword of the Almighty awoke* aganist him, and he spared him not.

This rebuke broke his heart. Let broken-hearted sinners look by faith upon a broken-hearted Saviour. The phrase denotes wo and dejection inconceivable, with a failure of all resource. Any thing may be borne while the spirit, the heart, remains firm; but if the heart itself be broken, who can endure? "A wounded "spirit who can bear†?"

It is not, therefore, surprising that he says, "I am "full of heaviness." In the evangelists we read, that "he began to be sore amazed, and very heavy‡," and he said to his disciples, "My soul is exceeding "sorrowful, even unto death." The most emphatical

* Zech. xiii. 7. † Prov. xviii. 14.
‡ Matth. xxvi. 37, 38.; Mark xiv. 33.

words are used to describe his sensation of the bitter conflict of his soul in the garden of Gethsemane, when as yet the hand of man had not touched him. He began to be "amazed*" or astonished. It properly signifies, to be struck with terror and surprise by some supernatural power, such as Belshazzar felt when he saw the hand-writing against him upon the wall†; and to be "very heavy‡" sated with grief, full, so as to be incapable of more. Some critics explain the word, as importing such an oppression of mind as quite unfits a person for converse or society, [compare Job xxx. 29.] He said, "I am exceeding sorrowful§"—surrounded, encompassed with sorrows. It is added, he was in an "agony‖"—a consternation of mind, such as arises from the prospect of some impending, unavoidable evil; like the suspense of mariners upon the point of shipwreck, who tremble equally at the view of the raging waves behind them, and the rocky shore before their eyes, on which they expect in a few moments to be dashed. The evils he was to bear, and to expiate, were now collecting to a point, and formed a dark tremendous storm just ready to break upon his devoted head; and the prospect filled his soul with unutterable horror; so that his sweat was, as it were, great drops of blood falling down to the ground. Many have sweat under extremity of pain or terror; but his agonies, and the effect of them, were peculiar to himself: his sweat was blood.

This is not a subject for declamation. It rather becomes us to adore in humble silence the manifestation "of the goodness and severity of God**," in the Re-

* ἐκθαμβεῖσθαι. † Dan. v. 6. ‡ ἀδημονεῖν.
§ περίλυπος. ‖ ἀγωνία. Luke xxii. 44. ** Rom. xi. 22.

deemer's sufferings, than to indulge conjecture and the flights of imagination. What is expressly revealed we may assert, contemplate, and admire. "His soul was "made an offering for sin*." We know but little of the extreme *malignity* of sin, because we have but faint views of the majesty, holiness, and goodness of God, against whom it is committed. Yet a single sin, if clothed with all its aggravations, and the guilt of it brought home with power to the heart, is sufficient to make the sinner a terror to himself. Adam had sinned but once, when he lost all comfort and confidence in God, and sought to hide himself. We have but slight thoughts of the *extent* of sin. Not only positive disobedience, but want of conformity to the law of God, is sinful. Every rising thought which does not comport with that reverence, dependence, and love, which is due to God, from creatures constituted, furnished, and indebted, as we are, is sinful. The sins of one person, in thought, word, and deed, sins of omission and commission, are innumerable. What then is contained in the collective idea, in what the Scripture calls, "the "sin of the world?" What then must be the atonement, the consideration, on the account of which, the great God is no less righteous than merciful, in forgiving the sins, which his inviolable truth, and the honour of his government, engage him to punish. And they are punished, though forgiven. They were charged upon Jesus, they exposed him to a rebuke which broke his heart. They filled him with heaviness. When, therefore, we are assured that the justice of God is satisfied, with respect to every sinner of the race of mankind, who, in obedience to the divine command,

* Isa. liii. 10.

makes the sufferings of the Saviour his plea for pardon, and trusts in him for salvation; and that upon this one ground they are freed from all condemnation, and accepted as children; when we are told, that the glory of the divine perfections is displayed in the highest, by this method of saving millions, who deserved to perish; we safely infer the greatness of the cause, from the greatness of the effect. The sufferings of Christ, which free a multitude of sinners from the guilt of innumerable sins, must have been inconceivably great indeed!

II. Under this accumulated distress, though his will was perfectly submissive to the will of God, and his determination fixed to endure all that the case required; yet, as he was truly a man, he felt like a man. His fortitude was very different from a stoical hardness of spirit. All the affections of pure humanity, whatever does not imply sin, (such as impatience under suffering, and an undue, premature desire of deliverence,) operated in him, as they might do in one of us. It was no impeachment of his innocence, or of his willingness, that he wished, if it were possible, for some relief or alleviation of his misery. "He looked," as we do when we are in heaviness, for "some to have pity on him, and "to comfort him," but there was none. Though the pity of our friends is often ineffectual, and can afford us no real assistance; yet it gives a little relief to have those about us to whom we can open our minds; who will sympathize with us, and compassionately attend to our complaints, if they can do no more. And to be neglected and forsaken in extremity, especially by those who have professed great friendship, or are under great obligations to us, will be felt as an aggravation of the most distressing case that can be imagined. But thus it was with MESSIAH. He had to complain, not only

of the cruelty of his enemies, but of the insensibility and inconstancy of those who had professed the most cordial attachment to him. The impression this made upon him, as a man, was such, that it is distinctly specified in the prophetical enumeration of the ingredients which composed the bitter cup of his sufferings.

He was not only apprehended by cruel men, but betrayed into their hands, by one whom he had admitted into the number of his select apostles, who had been employed in his service, favoured with access to him in his more retired hours, and was present, with the rest, when he kept his last passover, and took his solemn and affectionate leave of them, before he entered upon his passion. It was not an avowed enemy, but one of the twelve who dipped with him in the dish, that was guilty of this enormous ingratitude and treachery. How keen are our resentments, if those to whom we have shown great kindness, are discovered to have studied our ruin while they wore the mask of friendship? Though MESSIAH was incapable of any sinful perturbation of mind, he was very capable of being painfully affected by the conduct of Judas: he had reason to look for pity from him, but he found none.

When he entered the Garden of Gethsemane, he commanded, may I not say, he entreated, his disciples to tarry there and watch with him. And to engage their utmost attention, he spoke plainly to them of his distress, saying, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even "unto death." Yet when he returned to them, the first, the second, yea, the third time, "he found them "sleeping." How tender, yet how forcible, was his expostulation, "Could ye not watch one hour*?" What!

* Matth xxvi. 40.

could they know that their Lord was in an agony, wrestling with strong cries and tears, and yet sleep! as regardless of his sorrows as of their own approaching danger! Were our dearest friends to show themselves equally insensible when we were in extreme anguish, would not their indifference wound our spirits? He also was a man; and we may conceive it some addition to his grief, that when he looked to them for pity and comfort, he found none.

When he was apprehended, notwithstanding their former protestations of zeal and love, "they all forsook "him and fled*." They sought their own safety, and left him in the hands of his enemies. The apostle Paul was thus deserted, and his expressions intimate that he felt it. "At my first answer no man stood by me, all "men forsook me†." He had imbibed likewise the spirit of his Master, and prayed that it might not be laid to their charge. And though the Lord Jesus pitied and excused the weakness of his disciples, and permitted them to take care of themselves, it was in them an instance how little he could depend upon those who were under the strongest obligations to him.

But Peter followed his Lord to the hall of the high priest, and there saw him, with his own eyes, insulted, arraigned, and unjustly condemned. Might he not expect that Peter, the most active and earnest of all his followers, would have pitied him at least at such a time. Alas! instead of pitying him, Peter "denied "him;" he denied, with oaths and imprecations, that he had any knowledge of him, whom he had seen transfigured upon the mount, and agonizing in the garden. We read, "that the Lord turned and looked upon

* Matth. xxvi. 56. † 2 Tim. iv. 16.

"Peter*." Who can conceive the energy of that look? It was full of meaning, and Peter well understood it. Surely, though a look of tenderness and compassion, it conveyed the expostulation of an injured benefactor, no less forcibly than if all who were present had heard him say, "Peter, is this the pity I am to expect from "thee?"

When he was nailed to the cross, he was surrounded only by enemies. These, as we have seen, far from pitying, or attempting to comfort him, derided and mocked him. How have some of us felt for our friends in their dying hours, though we have seen every possible attention paid to them, and every thing provided and done for them that could administer to their relief and comfort! But they who have the faith which realizes unseen things, have beheld their best Friend expiring in tortures, and insulted by his murderers in his last moments.

But had all his disciples been near him, and had all his enemies been his friends, still, in his situation, he would have been alone. The loss of the light of God's countenance will, to the soul that has enjoyed it, create a universal solitude, and render every earthly good tasteless, in proportion as that soul is united to him in love; and still more, if there be superadded a sense of his displeasure. They who have never tasted that the Lord is good, not having known the difference, can have no conception of this subject. Their minds are at present occupied with earthly things; and while they are thus engaged with trifles, they cannot believe, though they are repeatedly told it, that to an immortal spirit, a separation from the favour of God involves in it the very

* Luke xxii. 61.

essence of misery. But should death surprise them in their sins, tear them from all that they have seen and loved, and plunge them into an unknown, unchangeable world, then, (alas, too late!) they will be sensible of their immense, irreparable loss, in being cut off from the fountain of life and comfort. A suspension of this divine presence, with an awful sense and feeling of what those for whom he made himself responsible deserved, was the most dreadful part of the Redeemer's sufferings.—He was perfectly united to the will and love of his heavenly Father, and, by the perfect holiness of his nature, incapable of tasting satisfaction in any thing else, if his presence were withdrawn. But when he endured the curse of the law for us, "he looked to God for pity "and comfort, but he found none."

In this glass we are to contemplate the demerit of sin. But there are some sufferings due to the impenitent sinner, of which MESSIAH was not capable. I mean the consciousness of personal guilt, the gnawings of a remorseful conscience, and the rage of despair. If we add the idea of eternity to the whole, we may form some faint judgment of what they are delivered from who believe in him, and what misery awaits those who presume to reject him. Awful thought, to reject the only Saviour! If they refuse his mediation, they must answer in their own persons. Then they will find no pity, no comforter. For who, or what, can comfort, when the Lord God omnipotent arises to punish? What will your pleasures, your wealth, or friends, do for you, when the hand of the Lord shall touch you to the quick? What smile can you expect will support you, against the terror of his frown?

Should any of you hear the *Messiah* performed again, then and there, if not before, may God impress upon

your heart the sense of this passage. Then you will understand, that the sufferings of the Son of God are by no means a proper subject for the amusement of a vacant hour.

SERMON XXIII.

NO SORROW LIKE MESSIAH'S SORROW.

LAMENTATIONS i. 12.

Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow!

ALTHOUGH the Scriptures of the Old Testament, the law of Moses, the Psalms, and the prophecies*, bear an harmonious testimony to MESSIAH; it is not necessary to suppose, that every single passage has an immediate and direct relation to him. A method of exposition has frequently obtained, of a fanciful and allegorical cast, under the pretext of spiritualizing the word of God. Ingenious men, and sometimes men not very ingenious, have endeavoured to discover types and mysteries in the plainest historical parts, where we have no sufficient evidence that the Holy Spirit intended to teach them. And upon very slight grounds a proof has been attempted of the great doctrines of the Gospel, which may be proved, much more safely and solidly, from the passages of Scripture in which they are plainly and expressly revealed. But by taking this course, instead of throwing real light upon the places they have in this man-

* Luke xxiv. 44.

ner attempted to explain, they have perplexed their hearers and readers, and led them to question, whether there be any fixed and determinate sense of Scripture that may be fully depended upon? It is true, when we have the authority of an inspired expositor to lead us, we may follow him without fear; but this will not warrant us to strike out a path for ourselves, and trust to our conjectures, where we have not such an infallible guide. The Epistle to the Hebrews is a key to explain to us many passages in a higher sense than perhaps we should have otherwise understood them. But it is best for us to keep within safe bounds, and to propose our own sentiments, when not supported by New Testament authority, with great modesty, lest we should incur the censure of being wise above what is written. I may, without scruple, affirm, that the history of Sarah and Hagar is an allegory referring to the two covenants, because the apostle Paul*has affirmed it before me; but if I attempted to spiritualize the history of Leah and Rachel likewise, you would not be bound to believe me without proof. I may preach the Gospel of Christ from a text which mentions the manna or the brazen serpent†, because our Lord has expounded these things as typical of himself: but I must not be confident that every resemblance which I think I can trace is the true sense of the place; because I may imagine many resemblances and types which the Scripture does not authorize.

There is, however, a useful way of preaching, by accommodation, that is, when the literal sense is first clearly stated, to apply the passage, not directly to prove a doctrine as if really contained in it, but only to illustrate the doctrine expressly taught in other parts of the

* Gal. iv. 24. † John iii. 14.; John vi. 31. 35.

Scripture. Thus, for instance, if the question of Jonadab to Amnon* were chosen for the subject of a discourse, "Why art thou, being the king's son, lean from "day to day?" The history of the context directly proves the malignity of sinful, inordinate desire, and the misery of those who are under its dominion; that it poisons every situation in life, and renders the sinner incapable of satisfaction, though he were a king's son. The form of the question might then lead to observe, That believers are kings' sons, to show what are the great privileges of their adoption; and to inquire how it comes to pass, that many persons so highly privileged are lean, that is, uncomfortable, weak, and lauguishing in their profession? These points might not improperly be introduced by way of accommodation, though they are not directly deducible from the literal sense of the question.

The text I have just read to you has led me into this digression. I find it in the series of the passages in the *Messiah;* but I am not sure that, in the literal sense, it immediately refers to him. It is a pathetic exclamation, by which the prophet Jeremiah expresses his grief, or rather the grief of Jerusalem, when the sins of the people had given success to the Chaldean army, and the temple and the city were destroyed. Jerusalem is poetically considered as a woman, lately reigning a queen among the nations, but now a captive, dishonoured, spoiled, and sitting upon the ground. She entreats the commiseration of those who pass by, and asks, "If there be any sorrow "like unto her sorrow?" Such a question has often been in the heart and in the mouth of the afflicted, especially in an hour of impatience. We are all, in our

* 2 Sam. xiii. 4.

turns, disposed to think our own trials peculiarly heavy, and our own cases singular. But to them who ask this question we may answer, Yes—there has been a sorrow greater than yours, greater than the sorrow of Jeremiah, or of Jerusalem. They who have heard of the sorrows of Jesus, will surely, upon the hearing of this question, be reminded of him, whether it was the intention of the prophet to personate him or not. If we conceive of him hanging upon the cross, and speaking in this language to us, "Was ever any sorrow like my sorrow?" must not we reply with admiration and gratitude, "No, Lord, "never was love, never was grief, like thine."

The expostulation and the question are equally applicable to the sufferings of MESSIAH. The former, indeed, is not inserted in the Oratorio, but I am not willing to leave it out. The highest wonder ever exhibited to the world, to angels, and men, is the Son of God suffering and dying for sinners. Next to this, hardly any thing is more astonishing to an enlightened mind—than the gross and stupid insensibility with which the sufferings of the Saviour are treated, and the indifference with which this wonderful event is regarded by creatures who are so nearly concerned in it. If they believe in him, they will be healed by his wounds, and live by his death. If they finally reject him, they must perish; and their guilt and misery will be greatly aggravated by what they have heard of him! But sin has so blinded our understandings, and hardened our hearts, that we have naturally no feeling, either for him or for ourselves.

I. Is the expostulation suited to any person here? Can I, with propriety, say to some who are now present, Has this subject been hitherto nothing to you? Then, surely, you have not heard of it before; and, therefore,

now you do hear of it, you will, you must be affected. If you were to read in the common newspapers, that a benevolent and excellent person had fallen into the hands of murderers, who had put him to death in the most cruel manner, would it not be something to you? Could you avoid impressions of surprise, indignation, and grief? Surely if this transaction were news to you, it would engross your thoughts. But alas! you have rather heard of it too often, till it has become to you as a worn-out tale. I am willing to take it for granted that you allow the fact. You believe that Jesus Christ suffered under Pontius Pilate, was condemned by the Jews, and crucified by the Romans. And is it possible this should be nothing to you? Is it too insignificant to engage or deserve your attention? And yet, perhaps, you have wept at a representation or a narrative which you knew was wholly founded in fiction. How strange? What! the sorrows of Jesus nothing to you! when you admit that he suffered for sinners, and will probably admit that *you* are a sinner. No longer, then, boast of your sensibility; your heart must be a heart of stone. Yet thus it is with too many; your tempers, your conduct, give evidence that hitherto the death of Jesus has been nothing to you. You would not have acted otherwise, at least you would not have acted worse, if you had never heard of his name. Were his sufferings any thing to you, is it possible, that you would live in the practice of those sins, for which no atonement could suffice but his blood? Were you duly affected by the thought of his crucifixion, is it possible that you could crucify him afresh, and put him to open shame, by bearing the name of a Christian, and yet living in a course unsuitable to the spirit and precepts of his Gospel? But if you are indifferent to *his* grief, is it no-

ıg to you on your own account? What, is it nothing you whether you are saved or perish; whether you found at his right or his left hand in the great day ıis appearance; or whether he shall then say to you, ome, ye blessed, inherit the kingdom prepared for ɔu:" or, Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire*?" :re is no medium, no alternative. If you refuse this, :e remaineth no other sacrifice for sin. This lament- e indifference to the Redeemer's sorrows, is a full of of the baseness and wickedness of the human rt; and it is felt as such, when the Holy Spirit con- :es of sin. Natural conscience may excite a pain- conviction of the sinfulness of many actions. But stupid unbelief of the heart is, if I may so speak, sin of sins, it is the root and source of every evil, yet so congenial to our very frame, as we are de- ved creatures, that God alone can make the sinner it†; and when he does feel it, the sense of it wounds grieves him more than all his other sins.

I. With respect to the question, if we rightly un- stand what has been observed from the Scripture- ory, in the six preceding sermons, concerning the ticulars of his passion; we may answer, without itation, Never was suffering, or sorrow, like that ich MESSIAH endured in the day of the Lord's fierce er. It is possible that history, which is little more ı a detail of the cruelty and wickedness of mankind, furnish us with instances of many persons who e suffered excruciating torments, and have even n mocked and insulted in their agonies: But,

. Was there ever a character of his dignity and ex- ence treated in such a manner? Job considered his

* Matth. xxv. 34. 41. † John xvi. 9.

former state as a great aggravation of his sufferings. He enlarges upon the respect which had been shown him in his prosperity. "When I went out to the gate, "through the city, the young men saw me and hid "themselves, the aged arose and stood up. When "the ear heard me, then it blessed me; and when the "eye saw me, it gave witness to me*." But afterwards, speaking of fools, of base men, of the vilest of the earth, he adds, "Now am I their song, yea, their "by-word. They abhor me, and spare not to spit in "my face. They mar my path, they set forward my "calamity, they come upon me as a wide breaking-in "of waters†." But Jesus was the Lord of glory. He whom all the angels of God worshipped, was buffetted and spit upon by the lowest rabble. If a great king was degraded from his throne, and exposed to the derision of slaves, this would be a small thing, compared with the humiliation of him, who, in his own right, was "King of kings, and Lords of lords."

2. Was there ever so innocent a sufferer? When Aaron lost his two sons, he held his peace‡. A little before he had been guilty of making the golden calf. The remembrance of this offence composed his mind under his great trial. He saw that he deserved a still heavier punishment, and was silent. In like manner, David, when his rebellious son Absalom conspired against his life, was patient; he remembered the adultery and murder he had committed; and, though he mourned under his afflictions, he durst not complain§. The malefactor upon the cross submitted to his sentence, because he was a malefactor, saying, "And we

* Job xxix. 8. 11. † Job xxx. 8—14.
‡ Lev. x. 3. § 2 Sam. xvi. 11.

"indeed justly*." It is thus with all who know themselves. Under their severest afflictions, they admit the propriety of the prophet's question, "Why should a "living man complain†?" And they acknowledge, "It is of the Lord's great mercy they are not utterly "consumed‡." But Jesus was holy, harmless, and undefiled; he had fulfilled the whole law, and had done nothing amiss; yet he yielded himself, "as a lamb to "the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is "dumb, so he opened not his mouth§."

3. Did ever any other sufferer experience in an equal degree the day of God's fierce anger? In the greatest of our sufferings, in those which bear the strongest marks of the Lord's displeasure, there is always some mitigation, some mixture of mercy. At the worst, we have still reason to acknowledge, that "he hath not "dealt with us after our sins, nor according to the full "desert of our iniquities||." If we are in pain, we do not feel every kind of pain at once, yet we can give no sufficient reason why we should not. If we are exercised with poverty and losses, yet something worth the keeping, and more than we can justly claim, is still left to us; at least our lives are spared, though forfeited by sin. If we are in distress of soul, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, we are not quite out of the reach of hope. Even if sickness, pain, loss, and despair, should all overtake us in the same moment, all is still less than we deserve. Our proper desert is hell, an exclusion from God, and confinement with Satan and his angels, "where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not "quenched." Every thing short of this is a mercy.

* Luke xxiii. 41. † Lam. iii. 39. ‡ Lam. iii. 22.
§ Isa. liii. 7. || Psal. ciii. 10.

But Jesus, though he had no sin of his own, bore the sins of many. His sufferings were indeed temporary, limited in their duration, but otherwise extreme. Witness the effects, his heaviness unto death, his consternation, his bloody sweat, his eclipse upon the cross, when deprived of that presence, which was his only, and his exceeding joy. On these accounts, "no sorrow was "like unto his sorrow!"

The unknown sorrows of the Redeemer are a continual source of support and consolation to his believing people. In his sufferings they contemplate his atonement, his love, and his example, and they are animated by the bright and glorious issue. For he passed from death to life, from suffering to glory.

1. *His atonement*, apprehended by faith, delivers them from guilt and condemnation, gives them peace with God, and access to him with liberty as children*. Being thus delivered from their heavy burden, and from the power of Satan, and having a way open for receiving supplies of grace and strength according to their day, they are prepared to take up their cross, and to follow him.

2. *His love*, in submitting to such sorrows for their sakes, attaches their hearts to him. Great is the power of love! It makes hard things easy, and bitter sweet. Some of us can tell, or rather we cannot easily tell, how much we would cheerfully do, or bear, or forbear, for the sake of the person whom we dearly love. But this noblest principle of the soul never can exert itself with its full strength, till it is supremely fixed upon its proper object. The love of Christ has a constraining force indeed†! It is stronger than death. It over-

* Rom. v. 1, 2. † 2 Cor. v. 14.

comes the world. And " we thus love him, because " he first loved us; because he loved us, and gave him- " self for us*."

3. *His example.* The thought that he suffered for them, arms them with the like mind. They look to him and are enlightened. By his cross they are crucified to the world, and the world to them. They no longer court its favour, nor are afraid of its frown. They know what they must expect, if they will be his servants, by the treatment he met with; and they are content. He who endured the contradiction of sinners against himself for them, is worthy that they should suffer likewise for him. It is their desire, neither to provoke the opposition of men, nor to dread it. They commit themselves to him, and are sure that he will not expose them to such sufferings as he endured for them. So, likewise, under all the trials and afflictions which they endure more immediately from the hand of the Lord, a lively thought of his sorrows reconciles them to their own. Thus by his stripes they are healed, and are comforted by having fellowship with him in his sufferings.

4. Lastly, if more were necessary, (and sometimes, through remaining infirmity and surrounding temptation, every consideration is no more than necessary,) they know that their Lord passed through sufferings to glory. And they know, (for they have his own gracious promise,) " that if they suffer with him, they shall also " reign with him†." They are sure, " that the sufferings " of the present life are not worthy to be compared " with the joy which will then be revealed; and that " when Christ, who is their life, shall appear, they also

* 1 John iv. 19.; Gal. ii. 20. † John xii. 26.; Rom. viii. 18.

"shall appear with him in glory*;" and therefore they are comforted in all their tribulation, and can say, "None of these things move me, neither count I my "life dear unto myself, so that I may finish my course "with joy†."

SERMON XXIV.

MESSIAH'S INNOCENCE VINDICATED.

ISAIAH liii. 8.

He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? For he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken.

LET not plain Christians be stumbled, because there are difficulties in the prophetical parts of the Scripture, and because translators and expositors sometimes explain them with some difference as to the sense. Whatever directly relates to our faith, practice, and comfort, may be plainly collected from innumerable passages, in which all the versions, and all sober expositors, are agreed. That there are some differences, will not appear strange, if we consider the antiquity of the Hebrew language, and that the Old Testament is the only book extant, which was written during the time that it was the common language of the people. For this reason we meet with many words which occur but once; and others, which do not occur frequently, are evidently used in more than one sense. If we suppose, that a

* Col. iii. 4. † Acts xx. 24.

time should come, when the English language should be no longer spoken, and no more than a single volume in it be preserved, we may well conceive, that posterity might differ as to the sense of many expressions, notwithstanding the assistances they might obtain, by comparing the English with the French, Dutch, and other languages, which were in use at the same period. Such assistance we derive from the Chaldee, Syriac, Greek, and other ancient versions of the Old Testament, sufficient to confirm us in the true sense of the whole, and to throw light upon many passages otherwise dark and dubious; and yet there will remain a number of places, the sense of which the best critics have not been able to fix with certainty. Further, the prophecies are usually expressed in the style of poetry, which, in all languages, is remote from the common forms of speaking. The grand evidence to a humble mind, that the Holy Scripture was originally given by inspiration of God, and that the version of it which, by his good providence, we are favoured with is authentic, is the effect it has upon the heart and conscience when enlightened by the Holy Spirit. And without this internal, experimental evidence, the learned are no less at a loss than the vulgar.

An accquaintance with the Hebrew will, perhaps, suggest a meaning in this verse, (the latter part only of which is taken into the *Messiah,)* which may not readily occur to an English reader. But the purport of it is plainly expressed in many other passages. The text is not merely a repetition of what was spoken before concerning the Redeemer's sufferings; rather the declaration of what was to follow them begins here. It is the opening of a bright and glorious subject. He was taken, he was taken up, like Enoch and Elijah,

from prison, and from judgment, and who can declare his generation? or, (as the word properly signifies,) his age? Who can declare his state, the establishment and duration of his dignity, influence, and government? For though he was cut off, made an excision and a curse, from amongst men, it was not upon his own account, but for the transgression of my people, that he was smitten.

"God was manifested in the flesh*," and in the flesh he suffered as a malefactor. Undoubtedly the divine nature is incapable of suffering; but the human nature, which did suffer, was assumed by him "who is over all, "God, blessed for ever†." But he was justified in the Spirit; and sufficient care was taken, that in his lowest humiliation, though he was condemned and reviled, his character should be vindicated. I shall, therefore, consider at present the testimonies given to his innocence. Though he was cut off out of the land of the living, it was only as a substitute for others. He was stricken for the transgression of his people.

1. The first attestation, and which, of itself, is fully sufficient to establish this point, is that of Judas. He was one of the twelve apostles who attended our Lord's person, and who were admitted to a nearer and more frequent intercourse with him than the rest of his disciples. Though our Lord knew that his heart was corrupt, and that he would prove a traitor, he does not appear to have treated him with peculiar reserve; or to have kept him more at a distance than the other apostles; for when he told them, "One of you shall "betray me," they had no particular suspicion of Judas. He, therefore, was well acquainted with the more re

* 1 Tim. iii. 16. † Rom. ix. 5.

tired hours of his Master's life. He had been often with him in Gethsemane, before he went thither to betray him to his enemies. When he had acted this treacherous part, if he, who had been frequently present when Jesus conversed most freely in private with his select followers, had known any thing amiss in his conduct, we may be sure he would gladly have disclosed it for his own justification. Christian societies have usually been reviled and slandered by those who have apostatized from them; their mistakes, if they were justly chargeable with any, have been eagerly published and exaggerated; and many things often laid to their charge which they knew not. But Judas, on the contrary, was compelled by his conscience to return his ill-gotten gain to the chief priests and elders, and to confess, "I have sinned, in that I have betrayed the "innocent blood*." Considering the time of making this declaration, when he saw that he was already condemned, and the persons to whom he made it, even to those who had condemned him, it cannot be denied that he was an unsuspected and competent witness to his innocence. And the answer of the chief priests implied, that, though their malice could be satisfied with nothing less than the death of this innocent person, they were unable to contradict the traitor's testimony.

2. Though Pilate likewise condemned MESSIAH to death, to gratify the importunity of the Jews, he repeatedly declared his firm persuasion of his innocence; and he did it with great solemnity. "He took water, and "washed his hands," publicly, "before the multitude, "saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just per-"son†." He laboured for his release; though the fear of man prevailed upon him at last, as it has upon many, to

* Matth. xxvii. 4. † Matth. xxvii. 24.

act in defiance to the light and conviction of his conscience. And from him we learn, that Herod*, notwithstanding he mocked him and set him at nought, considered the accusations of his enemies to be entirely groundless. And further, when the Jews proposed such an alteration of the title affixed to his cross as might imply that the claims our Lord had made were unjust and criminal, Pilate utterly refused to comply with their demand.

3. The thief upon the cross, with his dying breath, said, "This man hath done nothing amiss." If his competency as a witness should be disputed, because it is probable he had known but little of him, I admit the objection. Be it so, that this malefactor had little personal knowledge of our Lord. Then, his opinion of his innocence must have been founded upon public report; and therefore, it seems, he spoke not for himself only; but his words may be taken as a proof, that the people at large, though they suffered themselves to be influenced by the chief priests, to demand his death, and to prefer Barabbas, a robber and a murderer, to him, were generally conscious that he had done nothing amiss. Many of those who now said, "Cru-" cify him, crucify him," had, not long before, welcomed him with acclamations of praise, saying, "Ho-" sannah to the Son of David." This inconsistence and inconstancy is not altogether surprising to those who are well acquainted with the weakness and wickedness of human nature in its present state; and who consider the effects which the misrepresentations and artifice of persons of great name, and in high office, have often produced in the minds of the ignorant and

* Luke xxiii. 15.

superstitious. Thus, at Lystra, through the persuasion of the Jews, the apostle Paul was stoned and left for dead*, by the very people who, a little before, could with difficulty be restrained from paying him divine honours.

4. Though the salvation of men, and the honour of the law of God, required, that when MESSIAH undertook to make an atonement for our sins, he should be thus given up to the rage and cruelty of his enemies, suffer all the infamy due to the worst and vilest transgressors, and be deserted by God and man; yet his heavenly Father bore a signal and solemn testimony to his character. The frame of nature sympathized with her suffering Lord. The heavens were clothed with sackcloth; the sun withdrew his shining; the sanctuary was laid open, by the rending of the vail of the temple from the top to the bottom; the earth trembled greatly; the rocks were rent; the graves opened; and the dead arose. These events, in connexion with what had passed before, extorted an acknowledgment of his innocence from the Roman centurion, who was appointed to attend his execution.

Thus it appears that Judas, who betrayed him; the Jewish council, which could not find sufficient ground, even though they employed false and suborned witnesses, to pass sentence upon him; Herod, who derided him; Pilate, who condemned him; the malefactor, who suffered with him; and the commander of the soldiers, who crucified him; all combined in a declaration of his innocence: God himself confirming their word, by signs and wonders in heaven and upon earth.

It may seem quite unnecessary to prove the innocency

* Acts xiv. 13. 19.

of him who, in his human nature, was absolutely perfect, and in whom the presence and fulness of God dwelt; and it is indeed unnecessary to those who believe in his name. It is, however, a pleasing contemplation to them, and has an important influence upon their faith and hope. In this they triumph, "that he who knew no "sin himself, was made sin," was treated as a sinner for them, "that they might be made the righteousness of "God in him." "The High Priest of our profession "needed not," as those who typified his office of old, "to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then "for the sins of the people;" for he was perfectly holy, harmless, and undefiled. And had he not been a lamb without spot or blemish, he could not have been accepted on our behalf. It was the perfection of his voluntary obedience to the law of our nature, under which he submitted to be made, which, conjoined with the excellency of his character as the Son of God, made him meet, able and worthy, to expiate our transgressions. By the "one "offering"—of himself, once offered, "he has made "an end of sin, brought in an everlasting righteousness, "and having appeared with his own blood within the "vail, in the presence of God for us, and ever living to "make intercession for all who come unto God by "him," he is proposed in the Gospel as "the Author "of eternal salvation to all who obey him." "In him, "all the seed of Israel shall be justified, and shall "glory*." In him the true Israel, the partakers of the faith of Abraham, shall be saved, "saved to the utter-"most," "saved with an everlasting salvation; they "shall not be ashamed, nor confounded, world without "end."

But who that knows these things can sufficiently

* Isa. xlv. 17. 25.

commiserate the fatal effects of that unbelief which blinds and hardens the hearts of multitudes! especially that more learned and informed, and therefore more inexcusable, unbelief, which characterizes the modern patrons of scepticism. They read and admire ancient history. There is no old story so frivolous or improbable, but it is sufficient to engage their attention, and to exercise their acumen, if it be found in Herodotus or Livy. They spare no pains, they perplex themselves and weary their readers, with their attempts to decipher an ancient inscription, or to fix the date, or reconcile the circumstances of a supposed event, which, after all, perhaps never had place but in the imagination of the writer. Their implicit deference to such uncertain authorities as these, often verges upon the border of extreme credulity. The Bible is an ancient history likewise; and if it was only received upon the footing of the rest, as merely a human composition, the facts which it relates, and the manner in which they are related, the admirable simplicity of narration in some parts, the unrivalled sublimity of description in others; the justness and discrimination of characters; the views it unfolds, of the workings of the human heart, and the springs of action, so exactly conformable to experience and observation, might surely recommend it to their notice. And possibly, if it did claim no higher authority than a human composition, men, who have any just pretensions to taste, would admire it no less than they now undervalue it. But, because it does not flatter their pride, nor give indulgence to their corrupt propensities, they are afraid to study it, lest the internal marks of its divine original should force unwelcome convictions upon their minds. Therefore they remain wilingly ignorant of its contents, for the knowledge they discover of it is so very super

ficial, that a well-instructed child of ten years of age may smile at the mistakes of critics and philosophers. That such a book is extant, is undeniable. How can they account for its production? A view of what they actually have done will warrant us to assert, that the wisest men of antiquity, neither would have written such a book if they could, nor were they able, had they been ever so willing. And yet we have as good evidence, that the New Testament was written by plain and unlearned men, as we have for any fact recorded in history. How could such men invent such a book? And how should they, without seeming directly to design it, but incidentally, as it were, represent, that persons of such various characters, who concurred in putting Jesus to death, should all equally concur in establishing the testimony of his innocence!

True Christians, when they suffer unjustly, may learn, from the example of their Lord, to suffer patiently. The apostle presses this argument upon servants*; who in those days were chiefly bond servants, or slaves. He, therefore, evidently supposes, that the knowledge of the Gospel was sufficient to qualify people in the lowest situations of human life, with a fortitude and magnanimity of spirit, of which philosophy could scarcely reach the conception. In effect, to be much taken up with the interests of self, to live upon the breath of others, to be full of resentment for every injury, and watchful to retaliate it; these are the properties and tokens of a little and narrow mind. It requires no energy, no sacrifice, no resolution, to acquire such a disposition; for it is natural to us, and powerful and habitual in the weakest and least respectable cha-

* 1 Pet. ii. 18—21.

racters. But to act uniformly as the servants of God, satisfied with his approbation, under the regulation of his will, and for his sake cheerfully to bear whatever hardships a compliance with duty may expose us to, enduring grief, suffering wrongfully, and acting in the spirit of benevolence and meekness, not only to the good, but also to the froward; this indicates a true nobleness of soul. And to this we are called by our profession; for thus Christ suffered. He did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth; yet he was reviled, but he reviled not again. He suffered, though innocent; by he threatened not. He was crucified by wicked men; but he prayed for them while they were nailing him to the cross. This was an eminent branch of the mind that was in Christ; and it ought to be a distinguishing feature in the character of his people. For, is the disciple above his Lord? or, should the conduct of the disciple contradict that of his Lord? Undoubtedly, so far as we are partakers in the doctrine of his sufferings, and have real fellowship with him in his death, we shall resemble him. "If we say, we abide "in him, we ought to walk even as he walked*." But they who, calling themselves Christians, are full of the spirit of self-justification, contention, and complaint, while they profess to believe in him, deny him by their works. The apostles Peter and John, deeply affected by their obligations to him, and by the exquisite pattern of meekness and tenderness which he had set before them, departed from the presence of the council, not swelling with anger, nor hanging down their heads with grief, but "rejoicing that they were counted wor-"thy to suffer shame for his sake†." And he deserves

* 1 John ii. 6. † Acts v. 41.

no less from us than he did from them. It was for us, no less than for them, that he endured reproach, and was content to die as a malefactor, though he was innocent.

SERMON XXV.

MESSIAH RISING FROM THE DEAD.

PSALM xvi. 10.

For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.

THAT the Gospel is a divine revelation, may be summarily proved from the character of its Author. If an infidel was so far divested of prejudice and prepossession as to read the history of Jesus Christ recorded by the evangelists, with attention, and in order to form his judgment of it, simply and candidly, as evidence should appear; I think he must observe many particulars in his spirit and conduct, so very different from the prevailing sentiments of mankind, as to convince him, that man, in his present state, could not possibly have conceived the idea of such a character. Poets and historians have often employed their powers in delineating what appeared to them the great and the excellent in human conduct. But how different are the pictures of their admired heroes, sages, and legislators, from the portrait of the Saviour, as it is drawn with the utmost simplicity by plain unlettered men, who, without art or affectation, only describe what they profess to have seen and heard! I fix at present upon a single

consideration, which perhaps cannot be expressed more properly or forcibly than in the words of an ingenious writer now living:—"He is the only Founder of a re-"ligion, in the history of mankind, which is totally un-"connected with all human policy and government, and "therefore totally unconducive to any worldly purpose "whatever. All others, Mahomet, Numa, and even "Moses himself blended their religious institutions with "their civil, and by them obtained dominion over their "respective people. But Christ neither aimed at, nor "would accept of any such power. He rejected* every "object which all other men pursue, and made choice of "those which others fly from and are afraid of. He re-"fused power, riches, honours, and pleasure; and courted "poverty, ignominy, tortures, and death. Many have "been the enthusiasts and impostors, who have endea-"voured to impose on the world pretended revelations; "and some of them, from pride, obstinacy, or principle, "have gone so far as to lay down their lives rather than "retract: but I defy history to show one, who ever made "his own sufferings and death† a necessary part of his "original plan, and essential to his mission. This Christ "actually did; he foresaw, foretold, declared their ne-"cessity, and voluntarily endured them‡."

The death of our Lord was indeed essential to his plan; as such, it was constantly in his view, and he often spoke of it. Probably it was the whole of his enemies' plan; and when they saw him dead, buried, and the sepulchre sealed, they triumphed in their success, and expected to hear of him no more. But the

* John xviii. 36. † John xii. 24. 32, 33.

‡ Jenyns' Internal Evidence of the Christian Religion, p. 33, 34. Edit. 3.

Scriptures, which were read in their synagogues every sabbath-day, foretold his resurrection from the dead. The text before us, if there were no other, is a sufficient proof of this, to those who acknowledge the authority of the New Testament, since it is expressly applied to him by the apostles Peter and Paul.

The word in the Hebrew text, rendered in our version *soul*, is used in different senses. According to the connexion in which it stands, it signifies breath, life, soul, or spirit, and sometimes the dead body. The corresponding Greek word, where the apostle quotes this verse*, has likewise various significations. And the original words answering to *hell*, signify both the invisible world, or the state of the dead, and sometimes the grave. Notwithstanding this seeming diversity, we are at no loss here for the precise sense. Scripture is the best interpreter of itself. It is evidently the apostle's design to prove that the Psalmist foresaw, and foretold, the resurrection of that body which was taken down dead from the cross, and laid in Joseph's tomb. With this body our Lord arose on the third day, according to the Scriptures.

Though MESSIAH was, for our sakes, treated as a malefactor, all who were immediately concerned in his death, were constrained, (as we have seen,) to declare his innocence. But he was worthy of a more solemn and authoritative justification. Accordingly, "He was "declared to be the Son of God, with power, by his "resurrection from the dead †."

The apostle expounds "thine Holy One" by the word *flesh*‡. The human nature, the body formed by the immediate power of God, and born of a virgin, was holy.—

* Acts ii. 27. † Rom. i. 4. ‡ Acts ii. 26.

It was "A holy thing*." Perfect and pure, and therefore naturally not mortal, though subject to death for us. In this nature the Son of God was charged with sins not his own; he became willingly responsible for many†. Whatever was necessary on the behalf of sinners, to render their forgiveness consistent with the honour of the law, justice, truth, and government of God, was exacted of him, and he performed, and paid to the utmost. He made a full atonement for sin; and though he had power over his life, he hung hour after hour in agonies upon the cross, till he said, "It is finished." Then he resigned his spirit into the hands of his heavenly Father. He was afterwards buried. But having finished his whole undertaking, destroyed death, and him that had the power of it, and opened the way to the kingdom of heaven, in favour of all who should believe in him, "it "was not possible that he should be detained in the "grave‡." He had power likewise to resume the life he had laid down for his sheep; and he arose the third day, to exercise all power and authority in heaven and in earth.

His resurrection therefore is the grand principal fact upon which the truth and importance of Christianity rests. For though Christ died, if he had not risen again, "your faith and our preaching would be in "vain;" we should be "yet in our sins§." And though it was not necessary that his resurrection should have been so publicly known, at the time, as his crucifixion, the evidence of it is strong and decisive. No one point of ancient history is capable of such clear accumulated proof. The apostles frequently saw him, con-

* Luke i. 35. † Matth. xx. 28.
‡ Acts ii. 24. § 1 Cor. xv. 17.

versed with him, eat and drank with him, and were assured that it was he, by many infallible proofs. They could not be deceived themselves, nor could they have any temptation to deceive others. They declared his resurrection to the very people who put him to death, and they confirmed it by many indisputable miracles, which they performed in his name. They persevered in this testimony, in defiance of the malice of the Jews, and the scorn of the Heathens. And by this doctrine of a crucified risen Saviour, though unsupported by the patronage of human power, yea, though opposed by it in every place, they effected that change in the moral world, wherever they went, which the philosophers had not been able to produce, by all their instructions, in a single instance; turning men, whom they found under the strongest prejudices of education and habit, "from "darkness to light, and from the worship of dumb idols, "to serve the living and the true God*."

But there are proofs of this point which depend not upon arguments or history, which require neither learning, genius, nor study, to comprehend; but are equally adapted to persons of all capacities, and in all circumstances. These are the effects which this doctrine produces on the hearts of those who truly receive it upon the authority of Scripture, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, whose office it is to open the eyes of the mind, to take of the things of Jesus, (what the Scripture reveals of his person, offices, and glory,) and to present them, with infallible light and evidence, to those who humbly yield themselves to his teaching. These are made partakers "of the power of his resurrection†." It delivers them from guilt and fear, animates them with

* 1 Thess. i. 9. † Phil. iii. 10.

confidence towards God, weans them from the love and spirit of this evil world, inspires them with great and glorious hopes, and delivers them from the fear of death. They "are risen with Christ," by faith, "and seek the "things which are above*," where they know their Lord and Saviour is seated in glory.

I do but touch upon these particulars at present, because the subject will come under our consideration again, from a subsequent passage in the Oratorio. Yet I would not wholly omit leading your reflections to them, though what I briefly offer now, may make what I shall then offer, (if my life is prolonged to proceed so far,) appear under the disadvantage of a repetition of the same thoughts. Indeed, I know not how to place the proof of this capital doctrine in a light entirely new. The most satisfactory proofs are the most obvious; and it would be folly to substitute weaker in their place for the sake of novelty. But if I should live to resume the subject, some of you who are now present may not live to hear me. So far as concerns the fact, I may hope that the most, or all of you, are believers, and that you are already persuaded in your minds that "the Lord is "risen indeed†!" I am not preaching to Jews or Mahometans, but to professed Christians. But permit me to ask, What influence this truth has upon your hopes, your tempers, and your conduct? The powers of darkness know that Christ is risen. They believe, they feel, they tremble. I hope none of you will be content with such a faith as may be found in the fallen angels. As surely as he is risen, he will at length return to judge the world. "Behold, he cometh in the clouds, and "every eye shall see him!" They who are prepared

* Col. iii. 1. † Luke xxiv. 34.

to meet him, who are waiting for him, and who long for his appearance, have reason to rejoice that he once died, and rose again!

Many are the advantages which true Christians derive from a spiritual and enlightened knowledge of this doctrine. I will mention a few.

1. As MESSIAH was "delivered," that is, delivered up, as a hostage to the demands of justice, "for our "offences;" so they know that "he was raised again "for our justification*." By virtue of that union which subsists between MESSIAH, as the Head of his body, the church, and all his members; that is, all in the successive ages of the world, who believe in him by a faith of divine operation; he is their legal representative; he and they are considered as one. His sufferings, his whole humiliation and obedience unto death, is so imputed to them, that they thereby are exempted from condemnation; and though not from all sufferings, yet, from all that is properly penal, or strictly a punishment. What they suffer is only in a way of discipline or chastisement; and to them a token, not of wrath, but of love. On the other hand, as he by his resurrection was vindicated, justified from the reproaches of his enemies, declared to be the Son of God with power, and raised to glory; they have fellowship with him herein. God exalted him to glory, "and gave him "a name above every name," that "their faith and "hope might be in God†." They are not only pardoned, but accepted in the Beloved. And after this state of discipline is ended, they shall be treated as if they had never sinned. For if their sins are sought for in that day, they shall not be found. If any charge

* Rom. iv. 25. † 1 Pet. i. 21.

should be brought against them, it shall be overruled by this comprehensive, unanswerable plea—"Christ "that died, yea, rather that is risen again, appears in "the presence of God," acknowledges them as his own, and "makes intercession for them*." Among men, a criminal may obtain a pardon, may escape the sentence he has deserved, and yet be left in a destitute and miserable condition. But justification is God's manner of pardoning sinners, according to the sovereignty and riches of his grace in the son of his love. Those whom he pardons, he also justifies; and whom he justifies, he also glorifies. And even now in this life, though it doth not yet appear what they shall be, though their present privileges are far short of what they hope for, "and though eye hath not seen, nor "ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man "to conceive what God hath prepared for them†;" yet even now are they "the children of God‡."—And in the midst of their trials and infirmities, though conscious of much defect, and many defilements, in their best hours and services; and though they have not forgotten their iniquities and provocations, when they lived without God in the world; yet, according to the measure of their faith, exercised upon their Saviour who was raised for their justification, they can rejoice in the knowledge of their acceptance, and rely upon him for their perseverance; and they dare approach the great, holy, and heart-searching God, as to a Father, and pour out their hearts before him, with greater freedom than they can use to their dearest earthly friends. And, while they feel and confess themselves unworthy of the smallest of his mercies, they are not afraid to ask for

* Rom. viii. 33, 34. † 1 Cor. ii. 9. ‡ 1 John iii. 2.

the greatest blessings his bounty can bestow, even to be set as a seal upon his heart, and upon his arm, to be filled with all his communicable fulness, and to claim him as their everlasting portion.

2. The resurrection of Christ from the dead, is a pledge and specimen of that almighty power which is engaged on their behalf, to overcome all the obstacles, difficulties, and enemies, they are liable to meet with in their pilgrimage, which threaten to disappoint their hopes, and to prevent them from obtaining their heavenly inheritance. The first communication of a principle of faith and spiritual life to their hearts, whereby they are delivered from the dominion of sin, and from the spirit and love of the world, is attributed to "the "exceeding greatness of that mighty power" which raised the dead body* of their Lord from the grave, and set him at his own right hand, "far above all prin- "cipality and might, and every name that is named." And often the church, collectively, in its militant state, and the individuals which compose it, in their personal concerns, have been brought, to outward appearance, exceeding low. Their enemies have seemed upon the point of triumphing, and saying, Down with them, even to the ground. Such was the boast of the Jewish rulers, when they had slain the Shepherd, and dispersed his flock. But it was a short-lived boast. He arose, he ascended, he took possession of his kingdom for himself and for them. He poured out his Holy Spirit upon them, and they went forth preaching his word, which spread like the light of advancing day, from Judea to Samaria, and to the distant parts of the earth. The united force of the powers of hell and earth en-

* Eph. i. 19—21

deavoured to suppress it, but in vain. Many nations and kingdoms laboured to extirpate the very name of Christianity from among men, but they successively perished in the attempt; and the cause against which they raged is still preserved. "It is founded upon a "rock; and the gates of hell cannot prevail against "it*." Nor can any weapon prosper that is formed against the weakest and meanest of those who sincerely espouse this cause. He to whom they have devoted and intrusted themselves, has promised, "that none "shall pluck them out of his hands†." And while he remains faithful to his word, and able to fulfil it, they shall be safe. Yet they are often pressed above measure, beyond strength, insomuch that they, perhaps, despair even of life. But when they are at the lowest, the Lord is their helper; and they are taught by the exigences they pass through, to trust, not in themselves, "but in God who raised the dead‡." It is, indeed, the Lord's usual method of training up his people to an habitual dependence upon himself. When he has raised their expectations by his promises, he permits, as it were, a temporary death to overcloud their prospect; and that which he has said he will surely do for them, appears for a season, to the judgment of sense, impracticable and hopeless. We might illustrate this point at large from the history of Abraham, of Israel in Egypt, of David, and of the rebuilding of the second temple; and I doubt not but it might be illustrated from the history of many in this assembly. If you have been walking with God for any considerable time, you have met with turns and changes which have almost put you to a stand. You have been, and perhaps now

* Matth. xvi. 18. † John x. 28. ‡ 2 Cor. i. 9.

are, in such circumstances, that you feel you have no resource in yourself, and you are sure, that the help of man cannot relieve you; "but while your help is in "the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth*," and while you are warranted to trust in him, "who "raiseth the dead," you have no just reason to despond. It was a dark season with the disciples, when their Lord, whom they loved, "and in whom they "trusted, that it had been he who should have re-"deemed Israel†," was condemned, and put to death. But the appointed third day relieved their fears, and turned their mourning into joy.

3. His resurrection is the pledge and pattern of ours. As certainly as Christ, the first-fruits, is risen, so certainly shall they that are Christ's arise at his coming. And each of his people shall arise, *aliusque et idem*‡. Their bodies, though properly their own, shall be changed, "and fashioned like unto his glorious body§." This corruptible must put on incorruption; and the body, which is sown in dishonour and weakness, be raised in power and glory. Flesh and blood, in its present state, cannot inherit the kingdom of God. The body, in this life, is a clog and a burden to those who place their chief happiness in the service of God, and in communion with him. It is a vile body, defiled by sin, and it defiles their best desires and noblest efforts. Even the grace of the Holy Spirit, by which they live, though perfectly pure in itself, is debased, when communicated to them, and exercised under the disadvantages of a sinful nature, as the best wine will receive a taint, if poured into a foul vessel. The body, in an-

* Psal. cxxiv. 8. † Luke xxiv. 20, 21.
‡ Another and yet the same. § Phil. iii. 21.

other view, is a prison, in which the soul, confined and pent up, is limited in its operations, and impeded in its perceptions of divine things. Though we are probably surrounded by the glorious realities of the spiritual world, only short and transient glances of them are discoverable by us; we see but by reflection, and darkly*; we know but in part, and should know nothing of them, but for the good report of the word of God. Further, the body, as it is the seat of innumerable infirmities, and the medium which connects us with the calamities incident to this mortal state, is often a great hindrance to our most desirable enjoyments. Pain and sickness call off the attention, and indispose our faculties, when we wish to be most engaged in prayer; detain us from the ordinances, or prevent the pleasure we hope for in waiting upon the Lord in them. But our new, spiritual, and glorified bodies, will be free from all defilement or defect. They will be completely qualified to answer the best wishes, and most enlarged activity, of the soul. Then, but not till then, we hope to be all eye, all ear, always upon the wing in his service, and perfectly conformed to his image, in light, holiness, and love; for then we "shall see him as he is," without any interposing veil or cloud†.

* 1 Cor. xiii. 12. † 1 John iii. 2.

SERMON XXVI.

THE ASCENSION OF MESSIAH TO GLORY.

PSALM xxiv. 7—10.

Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O ye gates, even lift them up, ye everlasting doors, and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory.

THE institutions of the Levitical law were a shadow or sketch of good things to come. They exhibited a faint and general outline of the mediation and glory of MESSIAH. They may be compared to the delicate engravings on a seal, the beauty and proportions of which cannot be plainly discerned without the assistance of a glass. The Gospel answers to such a glass. Beheld through this medium, the miniature delineations of the law, which to the eye of unassisted, unhumbled reason, appear confused and insignificant, display a precision of arrangement in the parts, and an importance of design in the whole, worthy the wisdom of their great Author.

From the similarity of the subject of this Psalm and the sixty-eighth, it is at least probable that they were both composed upon the same occasion, the removal of the ark of the Lord, from its last stationary residence, to its fixed abode in Zion; when the king, the priests, the singers, and the harpers, all assisted in the procession,

attended by a great concourse of the people. The language of the latter part of the Psalm is evidently alternate. And we may conceive, that when the ark approached the tabernacle, the priests and Levites who accompanied it, demanded admittance for it in these words, "Lift up your heads, O ye gates," &c. and were answered by those who were waiting within to receive it, "Who is the King of glory?" To which question the proper reply is made, "The Lord of Hosts, He "is the King of glory."

This, if taken according to the letter of the history, was a grand and solemn transaction. But it was, at the same time, a type of an event unspeakably more glorious. They who know that the Scriptures of the Old Testament testify of Christ, that it is he of whom Moses in the Law, David in the Psalms, and all the succeeding prophets did write, will, I think, agree in considering this passage as referring to his ascension, in the nature in which he suffered, into the true holy place in the heavens, as the representative and high priest of his people; when, after having by his own-self purged our sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. Then having spoiled principalities and powers, he triumphed over them openly, though not in the view of mortal eyes. He lifted up his hands, and blessed his apostles, and while in this attitude he was parted from them*. He ascended gently and gradually, and they, admiring and adoring, beheld him with fixed attention, till a cloud concealed him from their sight†. The pomp and triumph of his ascension were displayed in the invisible world. But this description, accommodated to our apprehensions, is given to assist the faith of his people;

* Luke xxiv. 51. † Acts i. 9.

that their hearts may be comforted, their meditations enlarged, and that, in the exercise of grateful love, they may follow him in their thoughts, ascend with him into the heavenly places, and rejoice in his glory.

We conceive of him, therefore, from this sublime passage, as ascending to his Father and our Father, to his God and our God, accompanied with a train of worshipping angels, who demand admittance for MESSIAH, the Saviour and friend of sinners, as the King of glory. The question is asked, who is he that claims this honour? An answer is given, asserting his character, his victories, and the justice of his claims—"The Lord "of hosts, the Lord strong in battle, he is the King of "glory."

The principal points which offer to our consideration are,

I. His title, "The Lord of hosts."

II. His victories, implied in the expression, "The "Lord strong and mighty in battle."

III. His mediatorial title, "The King of glory."

IV. His authoritative entrance into the holy place.

I. MESSIAH, who humbled himself to the death of the cross, is, "the Lord of hosts." He is so, if the Scripture be true: I attempt no other proof. This is a point not referred to the discussion of our fallen reason, but proposed by the authority of God in his word, as the foundation of our faith and hope. He is the husband of the church, and the husband of the church is the Lord of Hosts*. It was the Lord of hosts whom Isaiah saw, seated upon a throne, his train filling the temple†. The vision filled him with astonishment, and he cried out, "Wo is me, I

* Isa. liv. 5. † Isa. vi. 1.

'am undone; for mine eyes have seen the Lord of 'hosts." But the apostle John assures us, that when Isaiah said these things, he saw his glory and spake of him*. This is the title of God in the Old Testament; or, as some choose to speak, of the Supreme Being. And it is ascribed to MESSIAH in many places. Therefore, if he were not the Lord of hosts, the Scripture would be chargeable with authorizing, yea, enjoining idolatry. But he is "the true God and eternal life†;" and they who give him the honour due to his name, have every thing to hope, and nothing to fear.

II. He is "the Lord, strong and mighty in battle." It was in his human nature he engaged in battle with his enemies and ours. But the battle was the Lord's. Therefore, though he "trod the wine-press alone, and "of the people there was none with him‡," his own arm brought him salvation. He is conqueror of sin, Satan, and death. We were under the power of these; therefore, for our sakes, he engaged in conflict with their united force. He fought, he bled, he died; but in dying, he conquered. The strength of sin is the law; this strength he subdued, by obeying the precepts of the law, and sustaining the penalty due to our transgressions. He destroyed death, and disarmed it of its sting. He destroyed him that hath the power of death, Satan. He shook, he overturned, the foundations of his kingdom, broke open his prison-doors, released his prisoners, delivered the prey out of the hand of the mighty, "and "having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a "show of them openly, triumphing over them in it§," that is, his cross. The apostle alludes to the manner

* John xii. 41. † 1 John v. 20.
‡ Isa. lxiii. 3. § Col. ii. 15.

of a Roman triumph, in which the conqueror was drawn in a chariot of state, attended by his officers and soldiers; the principal prisoners followed in chains, and all the treasures and trophies gained from the vanquished enemy were displayed to adorn the procession. Thus MESSIAH subdued the strength and policy of the powers of darkness, in the hour of his lowest humiliation, when he hung and expired upon the cross; and triumphed over them, gloriously leading captivity captive, when he ascended on high*. Satan, though still an enemy to his church and cause, is despoiled of his dominion; his power is only permissive, and in his fiercest assaults he is limited by bounds which he cannot pass, by a chain which he cannot break. And all his attempts are controlled and overruled, to the furtherence of the cause which he would suppress, and to the good of the persons whom he would worry and destroy. They are made acquainted with his devices, furnished with armour sufficient to repel him; and they fight under encouragement of a sure promise, that the God of peace will shortly and finally bruise Satan under their feet. As MESSIAH, their King, has conquered for them, so they in due time, shall be made more than conquerors, by faith in his blood, and in the word of his testimony.

III. The title of "King of glory," I understand as peculiarly applicable to him in the character of Mediator. The glory of his divine nature is essential to him. But, in consequence of his obedience unto death, he obtained, in the human nature, "a name that is "above every name†." He suffered as a man, yea, as a malefactor; there was no appearance of glory in that form of a servant which he assumed for our sakes.

* Psal. lxviii. 18. † Phil. ii. 9.

Though without sin, he was made in the likeness of sinful flesh, subject to poverty, disgrace, and death; but the same man who was crucified, dead, and buried, received glory and authority at his resurrection, and was highly exalted to the administration of all dominion and government. Perhaps the word *glory* is not easily defined. We conceive it as expressing brightness and splendour. The glory of Solomon was the combined effect of his wisdom, power, and riches; which distinguished him in his character, conduct, and appearance, from other men. The glory of the sun, is his effulgence and influence. The word *glory*, when applied to the blessed God, seems to denote that manifestation of himself, by which his intelligent creatures are capable of knowing him; for in himself he is infinite, inaccessible, and incomprehensible, and dwelleth in that light which no man, which no creature, can approach unto*. Of this manifestation there are various degrees. His glory shines in the creation. Not only do the heavens declare it by their immensity†, and furnish us with an idea of his unspeakable greatness, who has sent forth ten thousand worlds, to tell us that he resides above them all; but the smallest of his works, the grass and flowers of the field, and the insects which creep upon the ground‡, bear an impression of his wisdom and goodness, an inimitable criterion of his wonder-working hand, which so far displays his glory. To an attentive and discerning mind, his glory shines in his providence; in his preserving the world which he has made; in supplying the various wants of his creatures, and particularly in his moral government of mankind. Here, besides his wisdom, power, and general goodness, we dis-

* 1 Tim. vi. 16. † Psal. xix. 1. ‡ Psal. civ. 24, 25.

cover some traces of his character as the righteous Judge of the earth. But, to our limited capacities and views, this glory is obscured by many difficulties. Though "righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his "throne, yet clouds and darkness are round about "him*." By his holy word, his revealed will, we are favoured with a still brighter display of his glory, in the perfections of holiness, justice, truth, and mercy, which fallen man is unable clearly to discover in his works of creation and providence. But chiefly his Son is "the "brightness of his glory, and the express image of his "person†." No one hath seen God at any time, but "the only begotten Son, who is in the the bosom of the "Father‡," intimately acquainted with his counsels, "he hath declared him." This was the great design of his advent, to make God known to man: for as it is life eternal to know the only true God, so he is only to be known in and by Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent§, and who is the way and the door, and there is no entrance to the knowledge of God but by him. In the person and work of MESSIAH, the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, the brightness and harmony of all his attributes, is transcendently revealed. In this sense, he is the Lord, the King of glory. When we are enlightened by the Holy Spirit, to conceive of him according to the testimony given of him in the Scripture, we see the glory of God. Other discoveries of it are but scattered rays and emanations of light; but, in Jesus, the glory of God resides in its source and fulness, as light in the sun. He is therefore the King of glory.

* Psal. xcvii. 2. † Heb. i. 3.
‡ John i. 18. § John xvii. 3.

IV. As the acknowledged King of glory, in the nature of man, he ascended; the everlasting gates unfolded wide, and he entered into the holy place, not made with hands, there to appear in the presence of God for his people.

1. As their representative. The glory is properly his own, the benefit redounds to his people. Sin had excluded them from the kingdom; but he claimed and took possession in their name*. Hence he is styled their forerunner, because, by virtue of their relation to him, and their interest in him, they shall surely follow him. This is the encouragement of believers. He is the head of his body, the church: and though the church, while in this world, is in a suffering perilous state; yet as the body of a man is not in danger of drowning while his head is out of the water, so our forerunner and head being in heaven on their behalf, he will assuredly draw all his living members to himself. He has said, "Because I live, ye shall live "also†." And he has stipulated for them, that they shall, each in his appointed time, be with him where he is, to behold his glory‡.

2. As their high priest and intercessor. He presents their persons and their prayers acceptable to God. He bears the iniquity of their holy things. With this encouragement, weak and unworthy as they are in themselves, and though their best services are polluted, they find a liberty of access; and, because he ever liveth thus to make intercession for all who come unto God by him§, they know that he is able to save them to the uttermost.

* Heb. vi. 20. † John xiv. 19.
‡ John xvii. 24. § Heb. vii. 25.

3. Though the heavens must receive and contain the holy human nature till the restitution of all things, he is not unmindful of them in their present circumstances. He is seated upon the throne of universal dominion, and he exercises his authority and rule with an especial view to their welfare. While he pleads for them on high, by the power of his Spirit he is present with them below. He comforts their hearts, enlivens their assemblies, and manages their concerns. He is their Shepherd, who gives them food, controls their enemies, revives their fainting spirits, and restores their wanderings*. His ear is open to their prayers, his eye is upon them in every situation, and his arm stretched forth for their relief. Therefore, though persecuted, they are not forsaken; though cast down, they are not destroyed. And he has promised that he will not leave them, until he has done all that for them which his word has taught them to hope for; until he has made them victorious over all their enemies, and put the conqueror's song in their mouths, and a crown of life upon their heads.

This High and Holy One, this King of glory, who is seated on the throne of heaven, dwelleth also in the humble and lowly spirit. He thus solemnly claims the throne of the heart of each of his people, which in a state of nature is usurped by self and Satan; and he is thus willingly acknowledged and admitted in the day of his power. "Behold! He stands at the door, and "knocks†," and, because he is as yet unknown, he is for a while rejected. The bolts and bars of prejudice and unbelief withstand his entrance. But when he comes on a purpose of grace, he will take no denial. For a season he waits to be gracious. But he has an

* Psalm xxiii. † Rev. iii. 20.

appointed hour, when he reveals his great name, and makes the soul sensible who he is! Then the gates of brass and bars of iron are broken before him. His greatness and his goodness, what he is in himself, and what he has done and suffered for sinners, are motives which cannot be resisted when they are truly understood. Satan, who, as the strong one armed, long laboured to hinder him from his rightful possession, is himself dispossessed. The soul laments its former obstinacy, throws down its arms, throws wide open its doors, and bids the King of glory welcome. Then old things pass away, and all things become new. Such was the change the poor man experienced, out of whom Jesus cast a legion of evil spirit. At first, if he could, he would have prevented his kind purpose; he was afraid of his deliverer, and said, "I beseech thee, tor-"ment me not*." How wretched was his state then, miserable in himself, and a terror to others! But what a wonderful and happy alteration, when he sat quietly at his Saviour's feet, clothed and in his right mind!

I close the subject with the apostle's inference, "Seeing then that we have so great a high priest, who "is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let "us hold fast our profession†." Let not those who know him be ashamed of their attachment to him. You will not repent in a dying hour, that you once thought too highly of him, or expected too much from him, or devoted yourself with too much earnestness to his service. Nor yield to unbelief and fear. Though your enemies are many and mighty, and your trials great, greater is he that is with you. If the Lord, the Lord of hosts, the Lord strong and mighty in battle, be for

* Mark v. 7. † Heb. iv. 14.

you, who can be against you, so as effectually to harm you? Continue instant in prayer; persevere in well-doing. Our ascended Lord will one day return; and then they who have loved, and served, and trusted him here, "shall appear with him in glory*."

Others, if they can, must prepare to meet him. But, alas! how shall they stand before him? Or, whither shall they flee from him whose presence filleth the heavens and the earth†? Have they an arm like God? or can they thunder with a voice like his? As yet he is proclaimed by the Gospel, a Saviour, seated upon a throne of grace, stretching forth the golden sceptre of his love, and inviting sinners to be reconciled. Now is the accepted time. Hereafter he will be seen upon a throne of judgment, to take vengeance of his enemies.

SERMON XXVII.

MESSIAH, THE SON OF GOD.

HEBREWS i. 5.

For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee?

THOUGH every part of a revelation from God must of course be equally true, there may be a considerable difference even among truths proposed by the same authority, with respect to their immediate importance.—There are fundamental truths, the knowledge of which is essentially necessary to our peace and holiness: and

* Col. iii. 4. † Jer. xxiii. 24.

there are others, of a secondary nature, which, though very useful in their proper connexion, and though the right apprehension of them is greatly conducive to the comfort and establishment of a believer, are not so necessary, but that he may be a true believer, before he clearly understands them. Thus our Lord pronounced Peter "blessed*," for his acknowledgment of a truth, which had been revealed to him, not by flesh and blood, but from above, though he was at that time very deficient in doctrinal knowledge. It is not easy to draw the line here, and precisely to distinguish between fundamental and secondary truths; yet some attention to this distinction is expedient; and the want of such attention has greatly contributed to foment and embitter controversies in the church of Christ; while fallible men, from a mistaken zeal for the faith once delivered to the saints, have laboured to enforce all their religious sentiments with an equal and indiscriminate vehemence. It is evident that the truths essential to the very being of a Christian must be known and experienced by all, of every nation, people, and language, who are taught of God†; for they, and they only, are Christians indeed who are thus taught. And therefore it seems to follow, that no doctrine, however true in itself, which humble and spiritual persons, who study the Scripture with prayer, and really depend upon divine teaching, are not agreed in, can be strictly fundamental. And perhaps the chief part of the apparent diversity of their sentiments does not so often respect the truth itself, as the different acceptation they put upon the words and phrases by which they endeavour to express their meaning to each other.

* Matth. xvi. 17. † Isa. liv. 13.

However, if there be any doctrine fundamental and necessary to be rightly understood, what the Scripture teaches concerning the person of MESSIAH the Redeemer, must be eminently so. Mistakes upon this point must necessarily be dangerous. It cannot be a question of mere speculation, whether the Saviour be God or creature; he must be either the one or the other: and the whole frame of our religion is unavoidably dependent upon the judgment we form of him. If he be a man only, or if he be an angel, though of the highest order, and possessed of excellencies peculiar to himself; still, upon the supposition that he is but a creature, he must be infinitely inferior to his Maker, in comparison of whose immensity the difference between an angel and a worm is annihilated. Then all they who pay divine worship to Jesus, who love him above all, trust him with all their concerns for time and eternity, and address him in the language of Thomas, "My Lord and my "God*," are involved in the gross and heinous crime of idolatry, by ascribing to him that glory which the great God has declared "he will not give to another†." On the contrary, if he be God over all blessed for ever, Jehovah, the Lord of hosts, then they who refuse him the honour due unto his name, "worship they know "not what‡." For there is but one God; and, according to this plan, they who know him not in Christ, know him not at all, but are "without God in the world§." The judgment we form of the Saviour demonstrates likewise how far we know ourselves. For it may be fairly presumed, that they who think a creature capable of making atonement for their sins, or of sustaining the

* John xx. 28. † Isa. xlii. 8.
‡ John iv. 22. § Ephes. ii. 12.

office of shepherd and bishop of their souls, have too slight thoughts both of the evil of sin, and of the weakness and wickedness of the human heart.

We ascribe it therefore to the wisdom and goodness of God, that a doctrine so important, the very pillar and ground of truth, is not asserted once, or in a few places of Scripture only. It does not depend upon texts which require a nice skill in criticism, or a collation of ancient manuscripts, to settle their sense; but, like the blood in the animal economy, it pervades and enlivens the whole system of revelation. The books of Moses, the Psalms, and the prophets, all testify of Him, who was styled the Son of God in so peculiar a sense, that the apostle, in this passage, considers it as a sufficient proof that he is by nature superior to all creatures. The form of the question implies the strongest assertion of this superiority; as if he had said, Conceive of the highest and most exalted of the angels, it would be absurd to suppose that God would say to him, "Thou art my Son, this day "have I begotten thee."

The verse contains three terms which require explanation, "My Son," "Begotten," "This day." But who is sufficient for these things? If I attempt to explain them, I wish to speak with caution and modesty becoming the sense I ought to have of my own weakness, and to keep upon safe ground; lest, instead of elucidating so sublime a subject, I should darken counsel by words without knowledge. And I know of no safe ground to go upon in these inquiries but the sure testimony of Scripture. It would be to the last degree improper to indulge flights of imagination, or a spirit of curiosity or conjecture, upon this occasion. These are the deep things of God, in which, if we have not the guidance of his word and Spirit, we shall certainly bewilder ourselves

Nor would I speak in a positive dogmatizing strain; at the same time I trust the Scripture will afford light sufficient to preserve us from a cold and comfortless uncertainty.

The gracious design of God in affording us his holy Scripture, is to "make us wise unto salvation*." His manner of teaching is therefore accommodated to our circumstances. He instructs us in heavenly things by earthly. And to engage our confidence, to excite our gratitude, to animate us to our duty by the most affecting motives; and that the reverence we owe to his great and glorious Majesty, as our Creator and Legislator, may be combined with love and cheerful dependence; he is pleased to reveal himself by those names which express the nearest relation and endearment amongst ourselves. Thus he condescends to style himself the Father, the Husband, and the Friend of his people. But, though in this way we are assisted in forming our conceptions of his love, compassion, and faithfulness, it is obvious that these names, when applied to him, must be understood in a sense agreeable to the pefections of his nature, and in many respects different from the meaning they bear amongst men. And thus when we are informed that God has a Son, an only Son, an only begotten Son, it is our part to receive his testimony, to admire and adore: and for an explanation adapted to our profit and comfort, we are to consult, not our own preconceived ideas, but the further declarations of his word, comparing spiritual things with spiritual, attending with the simplicity of children to his instructions, and avoiding, as much as possible, those vain reasonings, upon points above our comprehension, which, though flattering to the

* 2 Tim. iii. 15.

pride of our hearts, are sure to indispose us for the reception of divine truth. A distinction in the Divine Nature inconceivable by us, but plainly revealed in terms must be admitted, upon the testimony and authority of him who alone can instruct us in what we are concerned to know of his adorable essence. "There are three "that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and "the Holy Ghost; and these three are one*." To each of these three the perfections of Deity are attributed and ascribed in various parts of Scripture. Each of them therefore is God; and yet we are sure, both from Scripture and reason, there is, there can be, but one God. Thus far we can go safely; and that we can go no further, that our thoughts are lost and overwhelmed, if we attempt to represent to ourselves how or in what manner three are one, and one are three, may be easily accounted for, if any just reason can be given, why a worm cannot comprehend infinity. Let us first, if we can, account for the nature, essence, and properties of the things with which, as to their effects, we are familiarly acquainted. Let us explain the growth of a blade of grass, or the virtues of the loadstone. Till we are able to do this, it becomes us to lay our hands upon our mouths, and our mouths in the dust. Far from attempting to explain the doctrine of the Trinity to my hearers, I rather wish to leave an impression upon your minds, that it is to us, (and perhaps to the highest created intelligences,) incomprehensible. But if it be contained in the Scripture, (which I must leave to your own consciences to determine in the sight of God,) it is thereby sufficiently proved; and humble faith requires no other proof.

* 1 John v. 7.

Allow me to confirm my own sentiments, by an observation of a celebrated French writer* to the following purport:—"The whole difference, with respect to "this subject, between the common people and the learned doctors, is, that while they are both equally ignorant, "the ignorance of the people is modest and ingenuous, "and they do not blush for being unable to see what "God has thought fit to conceal. Whereas the ignorance of their teachers is proud and affected; they "have recourse to scholastic distinctions, and abstract "reasonings, that they may not be thought upon a level "with the vulgar."

The form of baptism prescribed by our Lord for the use of his church, is thus expressed, "Baptizing them in "the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the "Holy Ghost†." It is evident, by comparing this sentence with that which I before recited from the epistle of John, that the WORD and the SON are synonymous terms, expressive of the same character. They are both the titles of MESSIAH. Of him John spoke, when he said, "The "Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us;" and of him God the Father said, "Thou art my Son, this day "have I begotten thee." Had God spoken thus to an angel, it would have been in effect saying, Thou art the Word, which in the beginning was with God, and was God, by whom all things were made. But to which of all the angels would the great God use language like this?

Our Lord, in his conference with Nicodemus, was pleased to say, "God so loved the world, that he gave "his only begotten Son‡," &c. It was undoubtedly his design, by this expression, to give to Nicodemus, and

* Abbadie. † Matth. xxviii. 19. ‡ John iii. 16.

to us, the highest idea possible of the love of God to sinners. He so loved the world, beyond description or comparison, that he gave his only begotten Son.—Surely then the gift spoken of must not be limited to signify the human nature only. This was not all that he gave. The human nature was the medium of the acts and sufferings of MESSIAH; but he who assumed it was the Word, who was before all, and by whom all things were made. It is true, the human nature was given, supernaturally formed by divine power, and born of a virgin. But he who was in the beginning God with God, was given to appear, obey, and suffer, in the nature of man, for us and for our salvation. And to him are ascribed the perfections and attributes of Deity; of which the highest angels are no more capable, than the worms which creep upon the earth.

I cannot, therefore, suppose, that the title of Son of God is merely a title of office, or belonging only to the nature which he assumed; but that MESSIAH is the Son of God, as he is God and man in one person. If the forming a perfect and spotless man, like Adam when he was created, could have effected our salvation, it would have been a great and undeserved mercy to have vouchsafed the gift; but I think it would not have required such very strong language as the Scripture uses in describing the gift of the Son of God. The God-man, the whole person of Christ, was sent, came forth, from the Father. The manhood was the offering; but the Word of God, possessed of the perfections of Deity, was the altar necessary to sanctify the gift, and to give a value and efficacy to the atonement.

The term *begotten*, expresses with us the ground of relation between father and son, and upon which only son is the heir of a father. I feel and confess

self at a loss here. I might take up your time, and perhaps conceal my own ignorance, by borrowing from the writings of wiser and better men than myself, a detail of what have been generally reputed the more prevailing orthodox sentiments on this subject. But I dare not go beyond my own ideas. I shall not, therefore, attempt to explain the phrase, *eternal generation*, because I must acknowledge that I do not clearly understand it myself. Long before time began, the purpose of constituting the Mediator between God and sinners was established in the divine counsels. With reference to this, he himself speaks, in the character of the Wisdom of God. "The Lord possessed me in the be-"ginning of his way, before his works of old. I was "set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever "the earth was. Then I was by him, as one brought "up with him, rejoicing always before him; rejoicing "in the habitable part of the earth, and my delights "were among the sons of men*." If the word of God had not engaged, according to an everlasting and sure covenant, to assume our nature, and to accomplish our salvation, before the earth was formed, he would not have appeared afterwards; for we cannot with reason conceive of any new determinations arising in the mind of the infinite God; to whom what we call the past and the future are equally present. In this sense, (if the expression be proper to convey such a sense,) I can conceive that he was the begotten Son of God from eternity; that is, set up and appointed from eternity for the office, nature, and work by which, in the fulness of time, he was manifested to men. But if the terms, *begotten*, or *eternal generation*, be used to de-

* Prov. viii. 22. 31.

note the manner of his eternal existence in Deity, I must be silent. I believe him to be the eternal Son; I believe him to be the eternal God; and I wish not to exercise my thoughts and inquiries more than is needful, in things which are too high for me.

The Scripture, in different places, evidently applies the purport of this phrase, "I have begotten thee," to transactions which took place in time, *This Day*, and particularly to two principal events.

1. His incarnation. Thus the angel to Mary, "The "Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of "the Highest shall overshadow thee;" therefore also "the holy thing which shall be born of thee, shall be "called the Son of God*." So the apostle, "In the "fulness of time God sent forth his Son made of a wo-"man†." And in the passage we are next to consider; "When he bringeth his first begotten into the world, "he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him."

2. His resurrection. To this purpose our text is quoted from the second Psalm. "The promise which "was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same "to their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus "again‡;" as it is also written in the second Psalm, "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee." And in another place he teaches us, that "he who was "of the seed of David according to the flesh, was de-"clared to be the Son of God with power, according "to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from "the dead§."

After all, I would remind you, that the best knowledge of the doctrine of the person of Christ, which

* Luke i. 35.
† Acts xiii. 32, 33.

affords life and comfort to the soul, is to be obtained, not so much by inquiry and study on our part, as by a gracious manifestation on his part. Prayer, attention to the great Teacher, a humble perusal of the Scripture, and a course of simple obedience to his known will, are the methods which he has prescribed for our growth in grace, and in the knowledge of himself. Thus even babes are made wise; while they who are wise and prudent in their own sight, the more they endeavour to investigate and ascertain the sense of Scripture, are frequently involved more and more in perplexity. He has given a promise and direction, for the encouragement of those who sincerely seek him: "He that hath my "commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth "me; and he that loveth me, shall be loved of my Fa-"ther, and I will love him, and will manifest myself "unto him*."

This is he with whom we have to do. In and by this Son of his love, we have access by faith unto God. Unworthy and helpless in ourselves, from hence we derive our plea: here we find a refuge; and on this we rest, and build our hope, "that God hath given us eternal "life, and this life is in his Son;" who is so much "bet-"ter than the angels, as he hath by inheritance ob-"tained a more excellent name than they†."

* John xiv. 21. † Heb. i. 4.

SERMON XXVIII.

MESSIAH WORSHIPPED BY ANGELS.

HEBREWS i. 6.

Let all the angels of God worship him.

MANY of the Lord's true servants have been in a situation so nearly similar to that of Elijah*, that, like him, they have been tempted to think they were left to serve him alone. But God had then a faithful people, and he has so in every age. The preaching of the Gospel may be compared to a standard erected, to which they repair, and thereby become known to each other, and more exposed to the notice and observation of the world. But we hope there are always many, who are enlightened by his word and Holy Spirit, and training up in the life of faith and holiness, known and dear to God, though they have little advantage from public ordinances, and perhaps no opportunity of conversing with those who are like-minded with themselves. But even though the number of those who visibly profess the Gospel of the grace of God were much smaller than it is, we need not be disheartened. If our sight could pierce into the invisible world, we should be satisfied that there are more with us than against us†. And such a power is attributed to faith. It is the evidence of things not seen‡, because it receives the testimony of Scripture, and rests upon it, as a certainty, and a demonstration; requiring

* 1 Kings xix. 10. † 2 Kings vi. 16. ‡ Heb. xi. 1.

no other proof, either of doctrines or facts, than that they are contained in the sure word of God. True Christians therefore are comforted by the assurance they have that their Saviour, the Lord of their hearts, is not so neglected and despised, nor his character so misunderstood and misrepresented in yonder land of light, as in this dark and degenerate world. Though too many here, like Festus, treat it as a matter of great indifference whether Jesus be dead or alive *, and ask them with a taunt, What is your Beloved more than another beloved? they are not ashamed, for they know whom they have believed; and if men will not join with them in admiring and praising him, they are sure that they have the concurrence of far superior beings. By faith they behold him seated upon a throne of glory, adored by all holy and happy intelligent creatures, whether angels, principalities, powers, or dominions. And when he was upon earth, in a state of humiliation, though despised and rejected of men, he was seen and acknowledged by angels. Their warrant and ours is the same. He is proposed to us as the object of our supreme love and dependence; and as we are enjoined to kiss the Son and to pay him homage, so when God brought him into the world, he said, "Let all the angels of God worship "him."

Though the bringing MESSIAH, the first or only begotten, into the world, may, as I have observed already, be applied to his incarnation, or to his resurrection, I apprehend it rather designs the whole of his exhibition in the flesh. At his ascension, having finished the work appointed for him to do, he was solemnly invested with authority and glory, and sat down at the right hand of

* Acts xxv. 19.

the Majesty on high. But in his lowest, no less than in his exalted state, the dignity of his divine person is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. He was always the proper object of worship. It was agreeable to right, and to the nature of things, and a command worthy of God, that all the angels of God should worship him.

The holy angels that excel in strength*, always do his commandments, hearkening to the voice of his word. We might be certain, therefore, that this highest and most comprehensive command a creature is capable of receiving from his Creator, is fulfilled by them, even if we had no express information of the fact. But we have repeated assurances to this purpose. Thus Isaiah, when he saw his glory and spake of him, "saw the "seraphim standing; each one had six wings; with "twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered "his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried "unto another, saying, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of "hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory†." I see not how the force of the argument arising from this passage, to prove that MESSIAH is the proper object of the most solemn adoration which creatures can offer to the Most High, can be evaded; unless any were hardy enough to assert, either that the prophet was himself imposed upon, or has imposed upon us, by a false vision; or else, that the apostle John‡ was mistaken when he applied this representation to Jesus Christ. But the apostle likewise had a vision to the same effect; in which, while his people, redeemed from the earth by his blood, cast their crowns at his feet, the angels were also represented as joining in the chorus of their praises,

* Psal. ciii. 20. † Isa. vi. ‡ John xii. 41.

saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that "was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, "and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing*." In brief, he is the Lord of angels. The heavenly host waited upon him, and sung his praises at his birth†. Angels ministered unto him in the wilderness. And they are so entirely his servants, that at his command they are sent forth to minister unto, and to attend upon, his believing people: "Are they not all ministering" [λειτουργικα, worshipping] "spirits‡," adoring the divine Majesty, yet "sent forth to minister" [εις διακονιαν, to the service] "to the heirs of salvation?" He is likewise the head of angels, though they are not in the same near relation to him as the sinners whom he has redeemed with his blood; for he took on him their nature. There was no redemption appointed for the angels who kept not their first habitation. But the confirmation of those who continue in holiness and happiness, is in and through him. "For all things both which are in hea-"ven, and which are on earth, are gathered together "in one" [ανακεφαλαιωσασθαι, reduced under one head into one body] "in him§." And they are therefore styled, in contradistinction from the others, The elect angels‖. He is their life, and strength, and joy, as he is ours, though they cannot sing the whole song of his people. It is appropriate to the saved from among men to say, This God shines glorious in our nature; he loved us, and gave himself for us.

Here then, as I have intimated, is a pattern and encouragement for us. The angels, the whole host of heaven, worship him. He is Lord of all. We in

* Rev. v. 12. † Luke ii. 13, 14. ‡ Heb. i. 14.
§ Ephes. i. 10. ‖ 1 Tim. v. 21.

this distant world have heard the report of his glory, have felt our need of such a Saviour, and are, in some degree, witnesses and proofs of his ability and willingness to save. He lived, he died, he arose, he reigns for us. Therefore, humbly depending upon his promised grace, without which we can do nothing, we are resolved, that whatever others do, we must, we will, worship him with the utmost powers of our souls. It is our determination and our choice, not only to praise and honour him with our lips, but to devote ourselves to his service, to yield ourselves to his disposal, to intrust our all to his care, and to place our whole happiness in his favour. I hope, in speaking thus, I speak the language of many of your hearts.

Some reflections easily offer from this subject, with which I shall close it.

1. They who love him, may rejoice in the thoughts of his glory. They have deeply sympathized with him, when reading the history of his humiliation and passion. It has not been a light concern to them, that he endured agonies, that he was rejected, reviled, scourged, and slain. He who suffered these things was their best friend, their beloved Lord, and he suffered for their sakes. In the glass of his word, and by the light of his holy Spirit, he has been set forth as crucified before their eyes; and they have been crucified with him, and have had fellowship with him in his death. From hence they derive their indignation against sin, and their indifference to the world, which treated him thus. But now he is no more a man of sorrows: his head, which was once crowned with thorns, is now crowned with glory; his face, which was defiled with spittle, shines like the sun; his hands, which were manacled, wield the sceptre of universal government; and, instead

of being surrounded by insulting men, he is now encircled by adoring angels. Therefore they rejoice with joy unspeakable, expecting soon to see him as he is, and to be with him for ever, according to the gracious promises he has made them, and the tenour of his prevailing intercession for them.

2. What an honour does his exaltation and glory reflect upon his faithful followers? The world that rejected him pays little regard to them; they are slighted, or scorned, or pitied, and in proportion as they manifest his spirit, experience a degree of the treatment which he met with; they are accounted visionaries or hypocrites; many of them are great sufferers; and few of them, comparatively, are distinguished among men by abilities, influence, or wealth; they are pilgrims and strangers upon earth; yet this God is their God. He who is worshipped by angels is not ashamed to call them brethren*. They are nearly related to him who sitteth upon the throne; and he is pleased to account them his portion, and his jewels. It doth not yet appear what they shall be; but the day is coming when their mourning shall be ended, their characters vindicated, and they shall shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Lord. They shall stand before him with confidence, and not be ashamed when he appears. Then shall the difference between the righteous and the wicked be clearly discerned. In that day the righteous shall say, "Lo, this is our God, we have waited for "him, and he will save us: this is the Lord, we have "waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his sal-"vation†:" while the others, however once admired or feared by mortals, the kings of the earth, and the great

* Heb. ii. 11. † Isa. xxv. 9.

men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, no less than those of inferior rank, shall tremble, shall wish in vain to conceal themselves, and shall say to the "mountains and rocks, fall on us, and "hide us from the face of him that sitteth upon the "throne, for the great day of his wrath is come*." In that hour, the striking description in the book of Wisdom, (which, though apocryphal, is in this passage quite consonant with the declarations of authentic Scripture,) will assuredly be realized: "Then shall the righteous "man stand in great boldness before the face of such "as have afflicted him, and made no account of his "labours. When they see it, they shall be troubled "with terrible fear, and shall be amazed at the strange-"ness of his salvation, so far beyond all that they "looked for; and they repenting, and groaning for "anguish of spirit, shall say within themselves, This "was he whom we had sometimes in derision, and a "proverb of reproach. We fools counted his life mad-"ness, and his end to be without honour. How is he "numbered among the children of God, and his lot is "among the saints†."

3. We may well admire the condescension of this great King, who humbleth himself even to notice the worship of heaven, that he should look upon the worship of sinful men with acceptance, and permit such worms as we are to take his holy name upon our polluted lips. If we know ourselves, we must be conscious of such defects and defilement attending our best services, as are sufficient to affect us with shame and humiliation. What wanderings of imagination, what risings of evil thoughts, what unavoidable, though un-

* Rev. vi. 15, 16. † Wisd. v. 1—5.

allowed workings of self-complacence, mingle without prayers and praises, and disturb us in our secret retirements, in the public assembly, and even at the table of the Lord! I hope we know enough of this, to be sensible that we need forgiveness, not only for our positive transgressions of his will, but for our sincerest, warmest, and most enlarged attempts to render him the glory due to his name! Yet we are incompetent and partial judges of ourselves; we know but little of the evil of our own hearts, and have but a slight sense of the malignity of that evil which is within our observation. But the Lord searches the heart and the reins; to him all things are "naked," without covering; "open*," without concealment. He understandeth our thoughts afar off, and beholdeth us exactly as we are. Our dislike of sin is proportionable to our attainments in holiness, which are exceedingly short of the standard. But he is infinitely holy, and therefore evil is unspeakably hateful to him. How vile and abominable therefore must our sins appear in his view! Indeed, if he was strict to mark what is amiss, we could not stand a moment before him; nor would it be agreeable to his majesty and purity to accept any services or prayers at our hands, if we presumed to offer them in our own name. But now there is an atonement provided, and a way of access to a throne of grace, sprinkled with the blood which speaketh better things than the blood of Abel. Now that we have an Advocate, Intercessor, and High Priest, to bear the iniquity of our holy things, we are accepted in the Beloved. Now the great and holy God vouchsafes to admit such sinners into communion with himself. He invites us to draw

* Heb. iv. 13.

near with boldness; and, because of ourselves we know not how to pray as we ought*, he favours us with the influence of his Holy Spirit. It is a great instance of the power of faith, that, remembering what we have been, and feeling what we are, and having some right apprehension of him with whom we have to do, we are enabled to approach him with confidence, and to open our hearts to him with greater liberty than we can use to our dearest earthly friends. His people know, by many infallible proofs, that his presence is with them in their secret retirements, and in their public assemblies, according to his promise. He hears and answers their prayers, he revives their spirits, he renews their strength; he gives them reason to say, that a day in his courts is better than a thousand of the world's days. Such are their expectations, and such, in the exercise of faith, is their experience. They worship him whom the angels worship; and they know, that, unworthy and defective as they are, their worship is no less acceptable to him than that of the angels in glory, by virtue of their relation to him, who is Lord both of angels and men.

4. Hence we may infer the necessity of that change of heart, which the Scripture expresses by a new birth, a new life, a new creation, and other representations, which denote it can only be effected by divine power. Till we are the subjects of this operation, we are incapable of enjoying, or even of seeing, the kingdom of God†. Though, to outward appearance, the congregation before me seem all to be serious and attentive, as if engaged in the same design, and animated with the same desire and hope; he to whom our hearts are

* Rom. viii. 26. † John iii. 3.

known, doubtless observes a great difference. Some of you, though custom, or a regard to your connexions, bring you hither, yet must be sensible that this is not your chosen ground, and that these are not the subjects which give you pleasure. We preach Christ Jesus and him crucified—Christ Jesus the Lord. The Lord sees, though I cannot, the indisposition of your hearts towards him. You are soon weary and uneasy; and you wish to throw the blame of your uneasiness upon the preacher. You regard his method, his manner, his expressions, with no friendly intention, in hopes of noticing something that may seem to justify your dislike; and a sermon not very long in itself, is to you very tedious. We wish well to your souls, we study to find out acceptable words; for though we dare not trifle with or flatter you, we are unwilling to give you just offence. But if you will be faithful to yourselves, you may perceive that it is not so much the length or the manner, as the subject of our sermons, that disgusts you. You would, perhaps, hear with more attention and patience, did we speak less of him whom the angels worship. There are assemblies more suited to your taste, and there are public speakers to whom you can probably afford a willing ear, for a much longer time than we detain you; because there you are at home. You are of the world, and you love the world. The amusements, the business, the converse, and the customs of the world, suit your inclination. But here you are not, if I may so speak, in your proper element; and yet it may be, there are persons in the same seat with you, who think themselves happy to hear what you hear with indifference or disgust. If you knew your state as a sinner, your need of a Saviour, and the ex*cellency* and glory of the Saviour whom we preach to

you, you likewise would be pleased; and a preacher of very moderate powers would fix your attention, and gain your esteem, if he preached this Gospel. But what ideas do you form of a future state? Surely, you cannot suppose, that in the eternal world you will meet with any of the poor expedients you have recourse to now, for filling up your time, which otherwise would hang heavy upon your hands. To attempt a detail of the round of vanities which constitute a worldly life, would be unsuitable to the dignity of the pulpit. Let it suffice, that death will remove you from them all.— If they are now necessary to what you account your happiness, must you not of course be miserable without them? If you believe you shall exist hereafter, do you not desire heaven? But such a heaven as the word of God describes could not afford you happiness, unless your mind be previously changed and disposed to relish it. Neither the employment nor the company of heaven would be pleasing to you. It is a state, where all the inhabitants unite in admiring and adoring him who died upon the cross. If this subject is displeasing to you here, it would be much more so there. Heaven itself would be a hell to an unhumbled, an unholy soul. Consider this seriously, while there is time to seek his face; and tremble at the thoughts of being cut off by death in your present state, insensible as you are of who he is, and what he has done for sinners.— May he enlighten your understanding, and enable you to see the things pertaining to your true peace, before they are for ever hidden from your eyes!

SERMON XXIX.

GIFTS RECEIVED FOR THE REBELLIOUS.

PSALM lxviii. 18.

Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: Thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them.

WHEN Joseph exchanged a prison for the chief honour and government of Egypt, the advantage of his exaltation was felt by those who little deserved it*. His brethren hated, and had conspired to kill him. And though he was preserved from death, they were permitted to sell him for a bond-servant. He owed his servitude, imprisonment, and sufferings to them; and they were afterwards indebted to him for their lives, subsistence, honour, and comfort; God in a wonderful manner overruling their evil conduct for future good to themselves. Thus Jesus was despised, rejected, and sold; and he was actually slain. But he arose, and ascended. The man of sorrows took possession of the throne of glory; and not for himself only: his honour is the source of happiness to those who were once his enemies, and rebellious against him. For the sake of such he lived and died. For their sakes he lives and reigns. He fought, conquered, and triumphed over their enemies. As their representative, he received gifts to bestow upon them: such gifts as their necessities required, derived from the relation he was pleased

* Gen. xlv. 4, 5.

to stand in to them, and from the value and dignity of his engagements on their behalf: such gifts as he alone could communicate, and which alone could restore them to the favour of God, and revive his image in their hearts, so as to make it suitable to his holiness and truth for the Lord God to return to his polluted temples, and to dwell in them and among them.

I formerly observed*, that this Psalm and the twenty-fourth, were probably composed and first published on the memorable occasion, when David, having obtained the victory over his numerous enemies, and settled his kingdom in peace, removed the ark, which till then had no fixed residence, into Zion. The apostle's application of this passage† authorizes us to consider that transaction as typical of our Lord's ascension. Jesus is the true ark. The holy law of God was in his heart; his obedience unto death was fully commensurate to the demands of the law‡; as the mercy-seat, or propitiation, which covered the ark, was exactly equal to its dimensions. He who had thus obeyed on earth, ascended on high; the everlasting gates unfolded, and he "entered into the holy place not made with hands, "there to appear in the presence of God for us§." In this state he is highly exalted upon the throne of glory, and administers all power in heaven and in earth. From hence is the honour, safety, and happiness of those who believe in him. They have nothing to plead for themselves. But, unworthy as they are, he is not ashamed to own them; and he assures them, that all he did, and that all he has received, so far as they are capable of sharing in it, is for them. The clauses as

* Page 292. † Eph. iv. 8.
‡ Rom. iii. 25. § Heb. ix. 24.

they lie in the text, suggest a convenient method for our meditations, and will lead me briefly to consider four points:

His ascension,—his victories,—the gifts he received for men,—and the great end for which he bestows them.

I. "Thou hast ascended on high." God formed man originally for himself, and gave him an answerable capacity, so that no inferior good can satisfy and fill his mind. Man was likewise, by the constitution and will of his Maker, immortal, provided he persevered in obedience. But sin degraded and ruined him, shut the gates of paradise and the gates of heaven against him. Man destroyed himself; but wisdom and mercy interposed for his recovery. A promise was given of the seed of the woman, who should bruise the serpent's head, defeat his policy, destroy his power, and repair the mischiefs he had introduced by sin. MESSIAH fulfilled this promise. And when he had finished all that was appointed for him on earth, as the second Adam, the head and representative of his people, he ascended on high, and opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers. As an illustrious proof to the universe, that God is reconciled; that there is forgiveness with him for sinners who implore his mercy; one in our nature, and on our behalf, has taken possession of the kingdom. The series of texts in this part of the Oratorio recalls this subject frequently to our thoughts; nor can we think of it too often. It is the foundation of our hopes, the source of our sublimest joys, and the sufficient, the only sufficient, answer to all the suggestions by which guilt, fear, unbelief, and Satan, fight against our peace. Surrounded as we are with enemies and difficulties, we plead, against every accusation and

hreatening that our Head is in heaven; we have an dvocate with the Father, a High Priest upon the hrone, who, because he ever liveth to make intercesion, is able to save to the uttermost. This is all our lea, nor do we desire any other. His ascension on igh, is a sure pledge that his servants shall follow him*. nd even at present, by faith they ascend and are seated ith him in the heavenly places†. They behold invisiles with the eye of their mind; they realize the glorious scene, from which they are separated by the veil f flesh and blood. They know that, even now, day nd night, day without night, myriads of golden harps nd happy voices resound his praise. The babe of Bethlehem, the Man who once hung dead and forsaken pon the cross, is now the Lord of glory. In the hought of his glory they greatly rejoice, because they ove him, and because they expect shortly to be with im.

II. "Thou hast led captivity captive." The expresion is emphatical. He has conquered and triumphed ver all the powers which held us in captivity, so that aptivity itself is taken captive. The spirit and force f it is destroyed; and his people, when released by im and walking in his ways, have no more to appreend from those whose captives they were, than a conqueror has to fear from a prisoner in chains. The nergy of the phrase is not unlike that of the apostle, hich we are hereafter to consider, "death is swal- lowed up in victory." Man by nature is a captive, n a state of confinement and bondage, from which he annot escape by any address or effort of his own.

He is a captive to sin; a sinful state is a state of

* John xii. 26. † Eph. ii. 6.

bondage; and this, notwithstanding the sinner is a willing captive, speaks swelling words of vanity, and boasts of liberty, while he is the servant, the slave of corruption. He is not always, and in every sense, a willing captive. Conscience sometimes remonstrates, fills him with fears and forebodings, which make him struggle to be free. And there are many sins, which, besides being offences against the law of God, are directly contrary to the sinner's present interest and welfare; and would be so upon his own plan, and if he was wholly his own master, and had no account to render of his conduct. Persons enslaved to habits of lewdness or drunkenness, need not be told from the pulpit, that the courses they pursue are injurious to their health, their business, or substance, their reputation and their peace. They know it and feel it, without a monitor. There are seasons, when the ill consequences they bring upon themselves, make them sick of the drudgery, and excite some efforts towards a reform. But in vain. The next return of temptation bears down all their resolutions like a torrent; and, after every attempt to amend, they usually become worse than before. For none can escape, unless the son makes them free. His grace can overcome the most obstinate habits of licentiousness, and implant the contrary habits of purity and temperance. But they who are not delivered by him must die in their chains.

III. "Thou hast received gifts, even for the rebel-"lious." To bestow gifts upon the miserable, is bounty; but to bestow them upon rebels, is grace. The greatness of the gifts contrasted with the characters of those who receive them, displays the exceeding riches of the Redeemer's grace. He came to save not the unhappy *only, but* the ungodly. He gives pardon, peace, and

eternal life, to his enemies; whose minds are so entirely alienated from him, that until he makes them willing, in the day of his power, their minds are determined against accepting any favour from him. They live long in contempt of the law and authority of God; and though justly obnoxious to his displeasure, while left to themselves, they despise and reject the proposals of his mercy. If they sometimes acknowledge themselves to be sinners, they still presume that they are able to procure his favour by their own performances. They strangely imagine they have a sufficient ground of hope, so long as it appears to themselves that they are not altogether so bad as others. And when, by the Gospel, the Lord treats them as sinners already justly condemned by the tenour of his holy laws, and informs them of the exigency of their case; that nothing less than the resources of his infinite wisdom, and the most extensive exertion of his unspeakable love, can possibly save them from destruction; the pride of their hearts rises against his declarations. His wisdom, in their view, is folly; and his love provokes their enmity and scorn. He says of MESSIAH, "This is my beloved Son, in "whom I am well pleased, hear ye him;" but the language of their hearts is, "We will not have him to "reign over us*." They revile and oppose the messengers of his grace, account them enemies, charge them as troublers of their peace, and as those who turn the world upside down: and, when not restrained by the providence of God, inflict upon them, besides, reproaches, stripes, imprisonment, tortures, and death. If their dearest friends, and those who are connected

* Luke xix. 14.

with them by the nearest ties of relation, submit to the testimony of God, and yield themselves to the appointed Saviour, they are treated as apostates from the general opinion. This defection from the common cause, is often sufficient to cancel the strongest obligations, to dissolve the closest intimacy, to raise a person foes in his own household, and to excite envy, hatred, and malice, in those who once professed esteem and love. Can the spirit of rebellion rise higher, than when they who have insulted the authority, defied the power, and resisted the government and will of the great God, proceed at length to trample upon his tenders of reconciliation, and to affront him in that concern which of all others is dearest to him, the glory of his grace in the person of his Son? Yet this is no exaggerated representation. Such is the disposition of the heart of man towards God; such were some of us; and such, I fear, some of us are to this hour. I do not say, that this enmity of the carnal mind acts, in every person who is subject to the grace of God, with equal rage and violence. In a land of light, liberty, and civilization, like ours, a variety of circumstances may concur to set bounds to its exercise; education, a natural gentleness of temper, and even interest, may keep it within limits of decorum, especially towards some individuals; but I affirm, or rather the Scripture declares, that enmity against God, a disaffection to his Gospel no less than to his law, and a dislike to those who profess and obey the truth, are principles deeply rooted in our nature, as fallen; and however they may seem dormant in some persons for a season, would operate vigorously, if circumstances were so to alter as to afford a fair occasion. For as, of old, "he "that was born after the flesh, persecuted him that was

" born after the Spirit*," even so it is now. And it is still as true as in the apostle's days, that " all who " will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall," in one degree or form or other, " suffer persecution†" from those who will not.

Thus men are characterized in the word of God, rebels and enemies, having " a neck of iron," to denote their obstinacy; "a brow of brass‡," to express their insolence and presumption; and " a heart of stone§," insensible to the softest methods of persuasion; incapable of receiving tender, kind, and generous impressions, though they are wooed and besought by the consideration of the mercies of God, of the dying agonies of MESSIAH; unless that mighty power be displayed in their favour, which brought forth streams of water from the rock in the wilderness.

MESSIAH died, arose, and ascended on high, that he might receive gifts for rebels of this spirit and disposition. The one grand gift I shall specify, is, indeed, comprehensive of every other good, the gift of the Holy Spirit. He said to his sorrowing disciples, " It is " expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not " away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if " I depart, I will send him unto you‖." Soon after his ascension, this promise was fulfilled. The disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit**;" and the people who had slain the Lord, were pricked to the heart, repented of their sin, received faith in him whom they had pierced, and experienced joy and peace in believing.

That the Gospel is preached upon earth by a succession of ministers called and furnished for that service,

* Gal. iv. 29. † 2 Tim. iii. 12. ‡ Isa. xlviii. 4.
§ Ezek. xxxvi. 26. ‖ John xvi. 7. ** Acts ii. 4—37.

and that the Gospel when preached, is not rejected by all, as it is by many, is wholly to be ascribed to the agency of the Holy Spirit, whose office and covenant-engagement it is, to convince "the world of sin, of right-"eousness, and of judgment*," and to glorify MESSIAH. He opens the eyes of the understanding, subdues the stubborn will, softens, or rather removes, the heart of stone, and gives a feeling, tender heart, a heart of flesh. Then the rebels relent and sue for mercy; then they obtain faith, repentance, remission, a full and free salvation, and all the gifts which MESSIAH has received for them.

IV. His ultimate design in favour of rebellious men, the great final cause of his mediation, and particularly of his bestowing on them the gift of the Holy Spirit, is, "that the Lord God may dwell among them." Man was created in the image of God, who formed him for himself. But he sinned, and was forsaken. God withdrew his light and love from him, and man sunk into darkness and misery. Sin and Satan took possession of the heart, which was originally designed to be the temple of the living God. But the Lord had a merciful purpose, to return in a way worthy of his perfections. Without him, the souls of men, and the whole human race, as to their proper happiness, are like what the earth would be without the sun, dark, cold, fruitless, and comfortless. But the knowledge of MESSIAH, like the sun, enlightens the world, and the heart.

When in the day of his power, by the revelation of his light and love, he destroys the dominion of sin, and dispossesses Satan, he reclaims his own, and takes possession for himself. The heart, sprinkled with the blood

* John xvi. 8.

of Jesus, and anointed with the holy unction, becomes a consecrated temple of the Holy Ghost. This persuasion, though now, by many who have not renounced the name of Christian, deemed the essence of enthusiasm, was once thought essential to Christianity; so that the apostle speaks of it as an obvious, incontrovertible fact, with which no true Christian could be unacquainted: "Know ye not that your body is the temple of the "Holy Ghost*?" Again, he speaks of Christ dwelling in the heart†:" "Christ in you the hope of glory‡." And in another place, "Ye are the temple of the living "God, as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and "walk in them§;" agreeably to his promise by the prophets. He liveth in them, as the principle of their life, wisdom, and power; therefore the apostle says, "I live; "yet not I, but Christ liveth in me‖." There is a mutual indwelling between the Lord and his people. They in him, as the branch in the vine; and he in them, as the sap in the branch. He in them, as in his temples; they in him, as in their strong tower of defence. And from hence we infer the duration of their life of grace; that it shall continue and spring up into everlasting life; since it is properly not their own, but his; and since he has said, "Because I live, ye shall live "also."

He dwells likewise among his people in their collective capacity. His whole church, comprising all the members of his mystical body, "built upon the founda- "tion of the apostles and prophets," form a building fitly framed together, a palace, a holy temple for the Lord, the great King. He dwelleth likewise in every

* 1 Cor. vi. 19. † Eph. iii. 17. ‡ Col. i. 27.
§ 2 Cor. vi. 16. ‖ Gal. ii. 20.

particular society who walk by his rule, and adorn the profession of his truth by a conversation becoming the Gospel. He is "a wall of fire round about" them, and a "glory in the midst of them*." When they meet together in his name, he is there. He walks in the midst of the golden candlesticks. It is his presence that gives life and efficacy to all his ordinances, and communicates a power to his word, by which the minds of his worshipping people are enlightened, strengthened, healed, and comforted. Here he manifests himself to them, as he does not unto the world; and they can adopt the words of the Psalmist, "A day in thy courts "is better than a thousand." To his presence they owe their peace and increase, their union and protection. And if he withdraws, *Ichabod* may be written upon their solemn assemblies†; for even his own appointments can afford them neither profit nor pleasure, unless they are animated by his glory. Their graces languish, their harmony is interrupted, strifes and dissentions take place, evil roots of bitterness spring up to trouble and defile them‡; "men arise" from among themselves, "speaking perverse things, and fierce wolves "break in, not sparing the flock§," if the good Shepherd suspends his influence and presence.

I trust he dwells and walks in the midst of us. He is here as an observer, and as a gracious benefactor. He sees who, "draw near him with their lips, while "their hearts are far from him;" and he likewise takes notice of them that fear and love him, and who esteem the light of his countenance to be better than life. "The high and lofty One who inhabiteth eternity, who

* Zech. ii. 5. 10.
† 1 Sam. iv. 21.
‡ Heb. xii. 15.
§ Acts xx. 29, 30.

" dwelleth in the high and holy place, dwelleth likewise " with those that are of a contrite and humble spirit*," to revive and bless them.

SERMON XXX.

THE PUBLICATION OF THE GOSPEL.

PSALM lxviii. 11.

The Lord gave the word, great was the company of those that published it, [or, of the preachers.]

PERHAPS no one Psalm has given greater exercise to the skill and the patience of commentators and critics, than the sixty-eighth. I suppose the difficulties do not properly belong to the Psalm, but arise from our ignorance of various circumstances to which the Psalmist alludes; which probably were, at that time, generally known and understood. The first verse is the same with the stated form of benediction which was used whenever the ark of the Lord set forward while Israel sojourned in the wilderness†; which confirms the prevailing opinion, that the Psalm was primarily designed as an act of thanksgiving, to accompany the removal of the ark to Zion by David. The seventh and eighth verses are repeated, with little variation, from the song of Deborah‡. The leading scope of the whole appears to be, first, a recapitulation of God's gracious dealing with Israel, and of the great things he had done for them, from the time he delivered them from their

* Isa. lvii. 15. † Numb. x. 35. ‡ Judges v. 4, 5.

bondage in Egypt; and then, a transition, in the spirit of prophecy, to the far greater things he would do for his people, under and by the Gospel-dispensation, in consequence of MESSIAH's exaltation to receive gifts for rebellious men. This verse, though the particular occasion is not specified, probably refers to some season of deliverance or victory, when the women, according to the custom of the nation, assembled to praise the Lord, with timbrels, songs, and dances*. The songs and responses of Miriam and her companions, and of the women who welcomed Saul and David after the defeat of the Philistine†, I have formerly mentioned as instances‡. The word which is rendered, "Those "who published or preached," being expressed with a feminine termination, leads the mind to this sense. But we are not necessarily confined to it; for the word rendered "preacher" in the book of Ecclesiastes, is likewise in the feminine form, though we are sure the person intended by it was Solomon.

However, this passage is properly introduced in the *Messiah*, and in its proper place, immediately after the view given of our Saviour's triumphant ascension, as it leads us to consider the first visible effect of that great event: for soon afterwards, "when the day of Pente-"cost was fully come," the Lord gave the word§. The Holy Spirit, the precious gift, which Jesus had received for rebellious men, descended with visible emblems and a powerful energy, and inspired and qualified his disciples for the great work of establishing and spreading his spiritual kingdom. From that hour, great was the number of the preachers, and great was the success

* Exod. xv. † 1 Sam. xviii. 6, 7.
‡ Ser. VI. p. 69. § Acts ii. 1—4.

and efficacy of their mission. So that in a few years the Gospel spread like the light, from Jerusalem through all Judea and Samaria, and to the uttermost parts of the earth. And he who said, "Lo, I am with "you alway, even unto the end of the world*," has, by the same Spirit, perpetuated his word, and a succession of preachers, to our time; and has promised to perpetuate and work by the same means, till time shall be no more.

My text, therefore, if not a direct prophecy of the publication of the Gospel, is at least a fit motto to a discourse on this very important subject. We may consider it in two senses, which, though something different, are equally agreeable to the words before us, and to the general tenour of the Scripture.

I. That the message is the Lord's. He gave the word, and prescribed to his servants the subject-matter of their preaching.

II. That the messengers employed are called and sent forth by him. The Lord gave the word or command; in consequence of which word, the number of preachers was great, as when in the beginning he said, "Let there be light, and there was light."

I. The Lord gave the word which the multitude of preachers went forth to publish. His merciful design was great, to deliver sinners from bondage, misery, and death; and to bless them with liberty, life, and peace. But they are by nature rebellious and obstinate, and must be made willing. He only can subdue their prejudices, and soften their spirits; and he has promised to display his power in their favour, by a certain mean of his own appointment, and we cannot expect that he

* Matth. xxviii. 20.

will do it in any other way. This mean is the Gospel, which, for its admirable suitableness and efficacy, is commended to us as "his wisdom and his power*." He has given it for this purpose, and his blessing makes it successful. He has said concerning it, "As the rain "cometh down and the snow from heaven, and wa- "tereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, "that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the "eater; so shall my word be, that goeth forth out of "my mouth; it shall not return unto me void, but it "shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall pros- "per in the thing whereto I sent it†." It has been confirmed by the experience of ages, that no mean but this can produce the desirable effect. It is confirmed, by observation, in the present day. If the wisdom of man, if learning, if oratory, if animated descriptions of the beauty of virtue, and pathetic persuasions to the practice of it, could reform, we should be a reformed people. But, alas! this is only to oppose a mound of sand to the violence of a flood. Notwithstanding many ingenious sermons and treatises upon this plan are admired and praised, wickedness prevails and triumphs. They have little influence upon the conduct of civil life; and, I may boldly say, no influence to inspire the heart with the love and peace of God, and to bring it into a habit of subjection to his will and command. Nothing will do this but the Gospel, the word which the Lord has given. This alone shows the evil of sin in its true light, affords a solid ground for the hope of mercy, and furnishes those motives which alone are sufficient to break the force of the temptations and difficulties with which we have to conflict. When this word is simply

* 1 Cor. i. 23, 24. † Isa. lv. 10, 11.

and cordially received, an immediate and wonderful change takes place. The sinner abandons his false hopes and vain pursuits, is freed from his former slavery to the love of the world and the fear of man, and becomes the willing servant of him who redeemed him with his own blood.

But we are sometimes asked, what we understand by the Gospel? The use of the term, in a restrained sense, so as to imply there are but few comparatively who preach it, is deemed invidious and assuming; and it is supposed by many, that a sermon, if delivered from a pulpit, and if the text be taken from the Bible, must of course be the Gospel. It is undeniable, however, that there are a variety of different and opposite sentiments delivered from pulpits; and surely the Gospel cannot be opposite, contrary, yea, contradictory, to itself! It is a mournful consideration, that multitudes of people are not qualified to judge of this point. Not properly for want of ability, for many of them are persons of good sense and discernment, and can judge and talk well upon other subjects; but for want of attention. Their application is engrossed by the demands of business or pleasure, and they have neither leisure nor taste for a careful perusal of the Scriptures, nor for the examination of religious sentiments. If the language and elocution of the preacher be good, and if there be no close and painful address to the conscience, they are satisfied. The apostle Paul undoubtedly preached the Gospel; and he tells us himself that he preached Christ crucified; he preached Christ as appointed of God, "wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption*." He preached the cross of Christ†, he glorie

* 1 Cor. i. 30. † Gal. v. 14.

in it, and he determined to glory in nothing else. The Gospel treats all mankind as already in a state of condemnation; it declares their utter inability to save or help themselves; and it gives assurance of pardon and salvation to all who believe in the Son of God. That they may be encouraged and enabled to believe, it describes the dignity of his person, the necessity and greatness of his sufferings, the completeness of his atonement, the prevalence of his intercession—his love, authority, power, and faithfulness. These truths revealed and applied to a guilty conscience, by the power of the Holy Spirit, produce faith. The sinner perceives the sufficiency and excellency of such a Saviour, commits himself to his compassion and care, and renounces every other hope and service. He looks to the Saviour by the eye of his mind, with desire and admiration, and derives life from his death, healing from his wounds, as the Israelites, when wounded, were healed by looking upon the brazen serpent. And not only is the conscience relieved, by this knowledge of Christ crucified—the understanding is likewise enlightened, the judgment is formed, the affections regulated and directed by it. The old things pass away, all becomes new. The love of sin departs, and the future life is devoted to him, who therefore "died and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and "the living*."

There is likewise a certain energy or power which accompanies the Gospel when it is truly preached, which sufficiently characterizes and distinguishes it from all other religious schemes and systems. Our Lord, during his personal ministry, frequently gave proofs

* Rom. xiv. 9.

that he knew the heart of man. When Zaccheus thought himself unknown and unseen, he called him by his name*. He reminded Nathaniel of what had passed in secret under the fig-tree†; and by a few words, brought to the remembrance of the woman of Samaria all that she had done in her life‡. A similar effect accompanies the preaching of his Gospel to this day. The Gospel is preached, when they who are present find the secrets of their hearts are made manifest; when the preacher, who perhaps never saw them before, reminds them of what they have done, or said, or thought, possibly of things transacted long ago, and almost forgotten by themselves; and likewise describes the very feelings of their hearts while he is speaking to them. It is usually in this way that conviction of sin first takes place; and in this way, that a convinced, burdened sinner, meets with seasonable support and direction, so exactly suited to his case, that he almost thinks the preacher is speaking to none but himself. No preachers but those who speak in conformity to the word which the Lord gave, have this power over the heart and conscience.

II. It is owing to the word, the appointment, and power of God, that any persons are induced or enabled to preach this Gospel. Men may, indeed, assume the office of a preacher upon other grounds; there are too many who do. But though they speak in the name of the Lord, and as his ministers, if he has not sent them, they cannot declare his message in such a manner as to make full proof of their ministry§. They may profit themselves, according to their low views, and may ob-

* Luke xix. 5. † John i. 48.
‡ John iv. 29. § Tim. iv. 5.

the cost, or considering the consequences, he will most probably be disgusted and wearied. And if he seriously and properly considers before-hand what he is about to engage in, and has a due sense of his own weakness, he will tremble at the prospect, and direct his thoughts to some other employment, unless his call and support be from on high. What courage, wisdom, meekness, and zeal, appear requisite, in the view of such an inquirer, to qualify a man for preaching, and continuing to preach, a doctrine so unpleasing to the world as the doctrine of the cross has in all ages proved! What opposition, and snares, and difficulties, "what fightings from without, what fears within," may be expected! Surely, he will be ready to shrink back, and to say, "Who is sufficient for these things?" But the Lord, by the constraining sense of his love, and by giving a deep impression of the worth of souls, and by exciting in the mind a dependence upon his all-sufficiency, can and does encourage those whom he calls and chooses, to serve him in the Gospel. In themselves they are quite unequal to what is before them, but they obey his voice; they trust in his promises for guidance and protection, and are not disappointed. We are therefore directed to pray, that "the Lord of "the harvest would send," or rather, (according to the force of the Greek word,) "thrust forth labourers into "his harvest*."

3. That only he who sends forth his ministers can enable them to persevere. It is a service of continual exertion and expense, and requires a continual supply. The opposition of the world, and the power of temptation, acting upon the weakness and depravity of the

* Matth. ix. 38.

heart, would quickly prevail against the best ministers, if they were left to carry on the warfare at their own charges. They are at times, yea, frequently, in situations and circumstances which teach them feelingly the meaning of the apostle's words, "We were pressed out "of measure, above strength, insomuch that we de- "spaired even of life*." Besides the trials incidental to the Christian profession, which they are exposed to in common with others, they have many which are peculiar to their calling as preachers of the Gospel. Their chief pre-eminence over Christians in private life is a painful one; they have the honour of bearing a double share of the heat and burden of the day, and of standing in the foremost ranks of the battle, to provoke and receive the fiercest assaults of the enemy. Their only resource and hope is in the faithfulness and compassion of their Lord, under whose banner and eye they fight, and who has said, "Lo! I am with you alway, even to "the end of the world."

4. That the Lord only can give success to their endeavours. "Paul may plant and Apollos may water," but there is no increase unless he affords a blessing†. It is at least a presumptive proof, that he has called a man to preach, if he owns his labours, since he has not promised to own any but those whom he sends.

We must however allow, and observe, that to preach salvation to others, and even to be instrumental in saving souls, will not absolutely prove that the preacher is in a state of salvation himself. We hope it is generally so; but there are exceptions and instances, which should awaken our circumspection, and keep us constantly looking to the Lord in a spirit of humility and

* 2 Cor. i. 8. † 1 Cor. iii. 6.

dependence. There was a Judas among the apostles; and we are assured that at the last day, some, yea, many, will plead having done great things in the name of Christ, whom he will notwithstanding disown, as workers of iniquity*. Even the apostle Paul was impressed by this thought, and he has recorded the improvement he made of it for our instruction. "I keep under my "body, and bring it into subjection, lest that by any "means, after I have preached to others, I myself "should be a cast-away†."

SERMON XXXI.

THE GOSPEL MESSAGE, GLAD TIDINGS.

ROMANS x. 15.

[*As it is written*] *How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the Gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!*

THE account which the apostle Paul gives of his first reception among the Galatians‡, exemplifies the truth of this passage. He found them in a state of ignorance and misery; alienated from God, and enslaved to the blind and comfortless superstitions of idolatry. His preaching, accompanied with the power of the Holy Spirit, had a great and marvellous effect. His principal subject was the death of Jesus, who had lately suffered as a malefactor at Jerusalem. Though the transaction was past, and the scene at a considerable distance,

* Matth. vii. 22, 23. † 1 Cor. ix. 27. ‡ Gal. iv. 15.

yet, by the manner of his representation, the fact was realized to their minds; and they could have been no more affected, had they been actually upon the spot at the time. Jesus Christ was exhibited to them as crucified before their eyes*. By the same divine energy they were instructed in the knowledge of his character, who he was, and why he suffered; and likewise understood their own need of such a Saviour. Thus they hearkened to him, not with the indifference of the Athenians, but with application of all that he said to themselves. They heard, they believed, and they rejoiced. The apostle reminds them, that they had not received a cold speculative doctrine, but such a one as imparted a blessedness to them. This, indeed, many of them afterwards lost, when they were unhappily seduced by false teachers. But for a time the knowledge of a Saviour, so exactly suited to their circumstances, made them happy; and while they were so, they felt very strong emotions of gratitude and esteem for the messenger who brought them these glad tidings. Though he was by many accounted and treated as the off-scouring and filth of all things, the Galatians received him as an angel of God, and attended to him, as if the Lord, who sent him, had spoken to them in person. And, although he had till then been an entire stranger to them, his message opened a way to their hearts, and they gave him every testimony of the most cordial friendship; insomuch, "that had it been possible, they would have "plucked out their own eyes, and have given them to "him."

Thus, likewise, when Philip preached the Gospel in Samaria, the consequence was, great joy in that city†.

* Gal. iii. 1. † Acts viii. 8.

But when the Gospel is thus gladly received, there must be a suitable disposition of mind. It is sent "to "the poor." It is designed to "heal the broken hearted, "to deliver the captives, and to give sight to the blind*." And therefore they who are well satisfied with themselves, who say, "We see," and who boast of their freedom, cannot possibly judge either of the truth or of the importance of the Gospel doctrine. As the Lord waters the earth with a profusion worthy of his magnificence and bounty, and does not confine his rain to cultivated soils; so the good seed of his word often "falls upon the "highway, upon the rocks, and among thorns†;" but is only productive upon the good ground of an "honest "and good heart." Not that any human heart is truly good by nature, but some are prepared for the reception of the truth. And this preparation is the first effect of the word, when it brings forth fruit unto life eternal. It undeceives those who were for a time deluded with vain hopes, and convinces them that they are poor, and blind, and wretched, and helpless. Then they gladly accept the Gospel of peace, and the message is to them as life from the dead.

The passage in the prophet Isaiah, from which my text is quoted, is very animated and descriptive. "How "beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that "bringeth good tidings‡!" Imagine a distressed people, at the will and disposal of a conqueror, who was justly offended with them, and under the anxious, trembling uncertainty how he would treat them: if an authorized messenger should inform them, that instead of the punishment they deserved, the king vouchsafed them a free pardon, was ready to receive them with fa-

* Luke iv. 18. † Luke viii. 13—15. ‡ Isa lii. 7.

vour, and to bestow honours and possessions upon all who applied to him, without excepting the most guilty, even the ringleaders in rebellion; how welcome would this messenger be to them! This, indeed, is beyond the manner of men. No earthly monarch has either magnanimity to make, or power to make good, so gracious and unlimited a proclamation to a whole nation of rebels. But this is the manner of the great God. Such an act of grace is the Gospel. An act of grace to sinners, yet founded in righteousness, and displaying the glory of his justice equally with the riches of mercy. For it is founded on the mediation of the Son of his love, and procured by his blood. The messengers of this grace are thus welcomed and honoured by those who believe their report, "and are esteemed very highly "in love for their works' sake*." We may observe,

I. The message of the Gospel is "glad tidings" of "peace" and "good things."

II. The messengers, or preachers, find ample reward in their success and acceptance.

I. According to the Hebrew idiom, (which frequently obtains in the New Testament,) all good things are comprised in the term *peace*. They are eminently comprised in the peace of the Gospel; for it is "the peace of "God which passeth understanding." It brings a blessed assurance, that MESSIAH has made peace by the blood of his cross. They who believe this good report, derive from it peace of conscience; and are enabled to say, "Though thou wert justly angry, thine anger "is turned away†." It dispels their fears and forebodings, and inspires them with liberty to come to God as children; consequently, on their parts, alienation and

* 1 Thess. v. 13. † Isa. xii. 1.

enmity cease. They no longer conceive of him as an avenging judge or a hard master. They no longer dispute his authority, nor repine at his appointments. They become a willing people. They yield themselves to him. They cultivate peace in all their connexions. The forgiveness and bounty they have received, teaches them likewise to forgive, and be kind, as they have opportunity. They possess such good things as the world can neither give nor take away; communion with God, grace, wisdom, and power. They serve him with their all, and are supported by his good Spirit in every trying circumstance; and they have a good hope, which enables them to rejoice in tribulation, and to smile in death.

If the wickedness and obstinacy of mankind were not strongly described and exemplified in the Bible, and if we could forget that this obstinate perverseness was once our own character, we should find it difficult to conceive, after we understand the nature and design of the Gospel, upon what grounds a scheme so wisely and completely adapted to relieve men from misery, to promote their present comfort, and to secure their future happiness, should, instead of being received with thankfulness, generally excite contempt and opposition. Can the world afford a peace which shall abide and cheer the heart under all the changing circumstances incident to us in this mortal state? Can it propose any good, any honours, profit, or pleasures, worthy of being compared with the honour which cometh from God only, the light of his countenance, and the riches of glory? Can the influence of the world preserve us from trouble, or support us under it, or deliver us out of it? Has it any charms capable of soothing the anguish of a wounded conscience? Can it obviate *the stroke*, or overcome the fear, of death? Or can it

inspire the soul with confidence and joy, in the contemplation of that approaching day, when we must all appear before the tribunal of the supreme Judge? That the world, if we possessed the whole of it, cannot do these things for us, is acknowledged by many and felt by all. The Gospel proposes a cordial for every care, a balm for every wound; and none who make the experiment of its efficacy are disappointed. In other cases, they who have received great obligations, may speak highly of their benefactor; and they who, beyond hope, have been recovered from a dangerous malady, may commend the skill and care of their physician, to those who are labouring under the same disease, without giving offence. But if they who have obtained life and peace by believing in Jesus, proclaim his goodness, and point him out to their fellow-sinners as the only Physician and Saviour of souls, their testimony is charged with folly, and their endeavours rejected with scorn, as officious and impertinent. Men, while left to themselves, will not come to him that they may have life. The God of this world so works upon their prejudices, pride, and passions, that though the light of truth, shines around them like the light of the sun, the eyes of their mind are blinded, and they are pleased with their darkness, and unwilling to see*. Hence of the few, comparatively, who are favoured with a clear and faithful dispensation of the Gospel, the greater part, it is to be feared, reject the counsel of God against themselves; and his ministers, in all ages, have had cause to adopt the prophet's complaint, Lord, "who hath believed our report†?" It would be thus universally, if the Lord, who gave the word, and who sends forth the preachers, had not engaged his

* 2 Cor. iv. 4. † Isa. liii. 21.

promise, that they shall not labour wholly in vain, nor spend their strength for nought. He prepares a people to serve him, and to show forth his praise. And while some mock, others refuse to hear*; and others, with an indolent indifference, are content to hear again and again; there are others whose hearts are opened to receive the truth in the love of it. They hear and believe to everlasting life.

II. The instruments of this happy change find their reward in their work. In being owned to the salvation of a few, they are compensated for all the opposition they meet with from the many; and this on a twofold account.

First, and principally, for the love they bear to their Lord, and to souls for his sake.

To see his name made precious to the hearts of sinners; to see those who were blind admiring his excellency; to see those who were so far off from God brought so nigh; to see those who were wretched rejoicing in his goodness; to hear those whose lips were filled with folly, falsehood, or blasphemy, proclaiming his praise; such salutary effects of their ministry fill them likewise with praise and joy: and when their hearers express the power and spirit of the Gospel in their tempers and conduct, they can say, "Now we "live, if you stand fast in the Lord†."

A secondary satisfaction, which of itself is sufficient to make them full amends for all the scorn of an unkind world, is the share they have in the affections of the people who are thus benefitted by their ministry. This is the popularity which alone is desirable. It would be a small thing to be able merely to hold a

* Acts xvii. 32. † 1 Thess. iii. 8.

multitude by the ears; but to be approved and loved by those to whom the Lord has made them useful, is a high honour, and a source of sublime pleasure. When Peter and John* had healed the lame man, I doubt not but they were more affected by the simple honest testimony of his gratitude, than by the unmeaning wonder of all the surrounding multitude. If a true servant of the Lord, by any advantage of abilities or elocution, should attach a large congregation to a personal regard for himself, should be admired and beloved by them, and yet discover no attachment in them to the Saviour whom he preaches, their partiality to him would give him but little pleasure. He would be more ready to weep over them, than to rejoice in the preference they gave him. For he seeks not their applause, but their edification; and he aims not to promote his own glory, but the glory of him who sent him†. He is, indeed, glad to see them attending upon the means which God has promised to bless. But the faithfulness and closeness of his addresses to their consciences, by which many are sooner or later disgusted and driven away, is a proof that he does not want them merely to make up a number about him. They who make the office of a preacher an occasion whereby to promote their own interest or reputation, may, perhaps, obtain the reward they seek; but it is such a reward as can only satisfy a weak and mercenary mind; and from him whose name they prostitute, they can only expect the reward assigned to hypocrites and unbelievers.

But true Christians will, and do, set a high value upon the ministers who, with simplicity and godly sincerity, preach the Gospel of peace, in such a manner

* Acts iii. 11. † John xii. 44.

as to evidence that they are influenced by a regard to the glory of God, and to the good of souls; and they give proof of their affection in more ways than by speaking well of them.

1. By the satisfaction with which they accept a faithful ministry, as a balance to the trials they meet with in common life. There are many poor, and many afflicted people, who have little comfort in the things of this life, and in their own houses. Some are pinched by penury; and some who live in opulence, yet dwell, as the Psalmist expresses it, in the fire and among lions*: they suffer not less than the others, though in a different way, from the unkindness and opposition of their nearest connexions. But in the house of God, they are satisfied and comforted. And, according to the words of the prophet, "though the Lord is pleased "to give them the bread of adversity, and the water of "affliction†," yet, since their teachers are not removed into corners, but they have free access to the preaching of his word, and can attend upon a minister who careth for their souls, and meets them, when they are weary, with "a word in season," they bear their appointed cross with cheerfulness. Though they have much bitterness of heart at home, known only to themselves, they have the pleasure which a stranger intermeddleth not with, when they go up to the house of the Lord. But if the instrument, who is the messenger of God to them for good, be removed, and they are deprived of these opportunities, the regard they bore him is manifested by their sorrow for losing him; which often affects them more sensibly than all their other griefs.

* Psal. lvii. 4. † Isa. xxx. 20.

2. By taking kindly and in good part his most searching discourses in public, or even his reproofs and admonitions in private, if needful. For they know that he watches over their souls, as one who must give an account*. And because they love him, they do all in their power to make the service a pleasure, and not a grief to him. They do not wish him to speak smooth things to them, or to entertain them with the discussion of points in which they have little concern, but to hear that which is suitable to their own case and circumstances. And if the preacher discovers to them, that, through inadvertence, they have allowed themselves in any wrong practice, or have lived in the omission of any duty, instead of being offended with his plain dealing, they love him the better for it.

3. By their tenderness and sympathy with him in all his exercises; and by their care, according to their ability, to make his situation comfortable, and to avoid every thing that might give him just occasion for complaint or grief. The trials of a faithful minister are neither few nor small. His work is great; he is sure to meet with enemies and discouragements. He travails in birth for souls†; he is pained by the opposition of the wicked, the inconstancy of the wavering, and the inconsistency of many who make profession of the truth. He feels many anxieties for those who are inquiring the way to the kingdom, lest they should be turned aside and hindered; and too often the hopes he had indulged, of some who discovered a concern for religion, are disappointed. His inward conflicts are many. He often walks in much weakness, fear, and trembling‡. When he considers what he is, what he

* Heb. xiii. 17. † Gal. iv. 19. ‡ 1 Cor. ii. 3.

ought to be, and what he has to do, he is often distressed, afraid, and ashamed, and unable to speak. His path is spread with snares, his heart wounded with temptations. But his judicious hearers have some knowledge of what he endures for their sakes and in their service; they love him, pity him, and pray for him, and their kind attention comforts him under all his tribulations.

Sometimes their regard is rather improperly expressed; as when they not only value his ministry, but hold him so highly a favourite, that they can hardly hear another. A preference is certainly due to the person who is made especially useful, but no faithful preacher should be slighted. Though gifts and abilities are not equal in all, yet they are all the Lord's messengers, and entitled to regard.

Again, it is an improper regard, if they yield themselves implicitly to him, to be governed by his will. So far as we speak agreeably to the Scripture, which is the rule and standard of faith and practice, both to you and to us, we are authorized to require your attention and obedience; but you are not bound to receive what we propose, merely upon our own authority. There are those who account ignorance the mother of devotion, and expect an implicit compliance with their injunctions, by virtue of their office and personal influence. But a true minister will account it his honour and pleasure to preach to an enlightened people, who love and study the Bible, and, like the Bereans, search the Scripture*, to see if things are so as represented. "We have no dominion over your faith, but wish to "be helpers of your joy†." Nor do we pretend to

* Acts xvii. 11. † 2 Cor. i. 24.

dominion over your purses; though we are to remind you of the apostle's charge, "To do good, and to "communicate, forget not*."

How much are they to be pitied, who account that word of grace a burden, which to those who receive it with thankfulness, proves the balm and cordial of life! "Take heed how you hear." If the Gospel is not made to you a savour of life, it will be a savour of death. It will aggravate your guilt, and condemnation, and leave you utterly hopeless and inexcusable. If you continue impenitent and obstinate, the hour is coming when you will wish you had never heard of the name of Jesus. It had been better for you never to have been born, or to have lived and died among the savage Indians; or to have been an idiot or a lunatic to the end of your days, than to have lived where the doctrine of salvation was published in your hearing, if you finally reject the counsel of God against yourselves!

SERMON XXXII.

THE PROGRESS OF THE GOSPEL.

ROMANS X. 18.

———*Their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world.*

"THE heavens declare the glory of God†." The grandeur of the arch over our heads, the number and

* Heb. xiii. 16. † Psal. xix. 1.

lustre of the stars, the beauty of the light, the splendour of the sun, the regular succession of day and night, and of the seasons of the year, are such proofs of infinite wisdom and power, that the Scripture attributes to them a voice, a universal language, intelligible to all mankind, accommodated to every capacity. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. The combined effect of the visible works of the great Architect, presses a declaration upon the ear of reason—"The hand that made us is divine." We must, however, understand it of the ear of right reason. The loudest voice is unnoticed by the deaf. Thus it ought to be, and thus it would be, if man were indeed a rational creature, as he proudly boasts himself. That the fact in general is otherwise, that the bulk of mankind are no more affected by the works of God, than the beasts of the field; that the philosophers who profess to study them, so faintly discern, so frequently deny, the great First Cause of all, is a proof that sin has darkened and depraved the noblest powers of the soul, and degraded man into the state of an inattentive idiot. However the evidence, if it does not excite his admiration and praise, is abundantly sufficient to convict him of stupidity and ingratitude, and to leave him without excuse*.

This passage, taken from that sublime ode of David, the nineteenth Psalm, is applied by the apostle to illustrate the character, and the progress, of the still more wonderful display of the divine perfections, which God has made known by the glorious Gospel. A variety of truths shine, (like stars in the firmament,) in the system of revelation. But principally Jesus, the Sun of truth

* Rom. i. 20.

and righteousness, the source of spiritual light and life, answers to the description there given of the material sun. "His going forth is from the end of heaven, and "his circuit unto the ends of it; and there is nothing "hid from his heat*."

But the fulfilment of the promises repecting MESSIAH's kingdom is progressive. So far as this prophecy has been accomplished, the arm of the Lord has been revealed. It is his doing, and may justly be marvellous in our eyes. The truth of the prophecy will be proved by its final completion; which, though not likely to take place in our time, we may be assured that it cannot fail, for the Lord hath spoken it. And besides, we have a sufficient pledge and security for the whole, in what he has already done. It was not necessary for the fulfilling of this prophecy, nor consistent with the tenour of many other prophecies, that the spread of the Gospel should be instantaneous and universal on its first publication. MESSIAH is to rule in the midst of his enemies, till the appointed season, when all enemies shall be subdued under his feet. The Gospel, the rod of his power, is so admirably adapted to the necessities of mankind, that the obstructions it has met with must be ascribed to their wickedness and obstinacy. Not that they could resist the will of God. Had he intended to give it universal success from the beginning, the event would have been answerable. But it was his pleasure to conduct the dispensation of it, so as on the one hand to display his sovereignty, wisdom, and power, and on the other, to afford a full proof of the depravity and alienation of the heart of man. This point is so much misunderstood and misrepresented, that, though

* Psal. xix. 6.

it is attended with great difficulties, especially if we give way to vain reasonings upon it, I shall venture, in the present discourse, to offer a few thoughts towards clearing the subject, and vindicating, (if the very attempt be not presumptuous,) the ways of God to man.

When the Sun of righteousness, after a long night of darkness, arose upon the world, there appeared a strong probability that the prophecies concerning the extent of his vital influence, from east to west, from pole to pole, would soon be completely realized. In a very short space he was known and adored by multitudes, through the greatest part of the Roman empire, and beyond its limits. But, perhaps, for about seventeen hundred years since that period, the boundaries of his kingdom, though they have been altered, have not been much enlarged. If he has since in some measure enlightened the more western parts of the globe, the eastern regions, which once rejoiced in his light, are now overwhelmed with gross Mahommedan darkness. And if we were capable of investigating the state of the world at this day, we should probably find, that five out of six of the human race now living, never so much as heard of the name of Jesus as a Saviour. There is reason to fear, likewise, that in the nations who professedly call him Lord, and are not unwilling to be themselves called Christians, a greater proportion than of five out of six, are no less strangers to his power and grace, than the Mahommedans who reject him, or the Heathens who never heard of him.

There is not perhaps a darker chapter in the book of divine providence, nor a meditation which calls for a more absolute subjection and submission to the holy will and unsearchable wisdom of God, than this. The *first* spread of the Gospel proved it to be a divine ex-

pedient, fully capable of producing all the great purposes which the prophets had foretold, and which the state of the world required. It reconciled men to God, to themselves, and to each other. It subdued their passions, regulated their affections, freed them from the guilt and bondage of sin, from the love of the world, and from the fear of death. Wherever the doctrine of the cross was preached, it produced that salutary change of conduct which philosophy had long attempted in vain; and raised men to that life of communion with God, of which philosophers had no conception. Such was the bright morning of the Gospel day. But in time, yea, in a little time, dark clouds obscured its light, its progress was impeded, and in a manner stopped. On one hand, the profession and name of the Gospel gave occasion to mischiefs and abominations which had been unknown among the Heathens; so that the part of the world which received the name of Christendom, was little distinguished from the rest in a religious view, but by a fierce and rancorous superstition which tyrannized over the consciences, liberties, and the lives of men. On the other hand, as I have observed, the very name of Christianity was restrained to a small portion of the earth; many nations have not heard of it to this day; and many who once professed it, have renounced it long ago.

Thus the fact stands. We connot deny it. But how shall we account for it? Infidels and petty reasoners think they here find an invincible objection against the truth. They say, "If the Gospel you speak of be so "salutary and necessary, if it be indeed the greatest "effect of the divine goodness, why has not God, who "is the common Father of mankind, afforded it to all "the nations of the earth? and why is it restrained to

"so few?" But I think we may retort the question, and let them who propose it give such an answer, (if they can,) as shall not amount to a confession of the obstinacy and ungrateful folly of mankind. When the world saw the happy tendency and effects of this Gospel in the age of the apostles, why did they not universally receive it? We know that when the use of the mariner's compass, the art of printing, and many other inventions that might be named, were discovered in one country, they were presently adopted by the surrounding civilized nations. Even the recent attempts to venture through the air with a balloon, hazardous as they certainly are, and insignificant with respect to real usefulness, are likely in a little time not only to engage the notice, but to excite the imitation, of Europe. Why then was the Gospel, the most beneficial and important discovery the world has been favoured with, the only one that has been treated with general contempt? Certainly our Lord has assigned the true reason, "Light "is come into the world, but men love darkness rather "than light, because their deeds are evil*." They hate the light, they will not come to it, nor will they permit it to come to them if they can possibly prevent it. This glorious Gospel of the blessed God has been and still is shunned and dreaded, and every human precaution and exertion has been employed to withstand and suppress it, as though, like the pestilence, it was baneful to the welfare of society. May we not say, speaking after the manner of men, that the Lord has done enough to confirm his own express and solemn declaration, that he "has no pleasure in the death of "the wicked, but that the wicked may turn from his

* John iii. 19.

" way, and live*!" He has raised up a succession of faithful servants, from age to age, to publish these glad tidings. The reception they have met with, not only from the Heathens, but from nominal Christians, is well known to those who are acquainted with ecclesiastical history; which contains little more than a detail of the arts and cruelties by which the civil and ecclesiastical powers of almost every kingdom where the Gospel has been known, have endeavoured to suppress it.

The nation of Great Britain, in particular, has but little right to ask, Why the Gospel of Christ has been spread no further among the Heathens? The providence of God has favoured us with peculiar advantages for this service. Our arms and commerce have opened us a way to the most distant parts of the globe; and of late years the enterprizing spirit of our navigators has added almost a new world to the discoveries of former times. How far have our plans been formed with a subserviency to the great design of evangelizing the Heathen? How much have we done to promote it in Asia, where our influence and opportunities have been the greatest? What impression of the name and spirit of Christianity has our conduct given the inhabitants of India? But I forbear—facts are too well known to need recital; too glaring to need a comment. It is true, we have an incorporated society for propagating the Gospel in foreign parts, and we hear of missionaries; but of the good effects of their missions, as at present conducted, we neither hear, nor expect to hear. While America was ours, the efforts of a few individuals from the northern provinces in the last and present century were not without success.

* Ezek. xxxiii. 11.

But I fear this is all the honour we can claim. Some good has been done by the Danish mission to Tranquebar; but I believe our influence in it has been rather nominal than effective. The extent and effects of the labours of the *Unitas Fratrum* *, compared with their circumstances and resources, must not be omitted on this occasion. They doubtless excite admiration, and thankfulness to God, in every serious mind acquainted with the subject. But, excepting in these instances, I believe the Heathens have derived but little knowledge of the Gospel, from their connexions with Christendom, for some ages past. And I think none of the commercial nations in Europe have had the propagation of Christianity less at heart than the English. What obligations the natives of Africa are under to us, for instruction or example, may be estimated, in part, by a cursory survey of the state of our West-India islands.

That the Gospel is so little known in the world, and so little received where it is known, cannot be so properly ascribed to the will of God, as to the wickedness and wilfulness of men. Undoubtedly he to whom all things are possible, who has absolute power over the hearts of his creatures, could make a way for the universal reception of it. And we trust that in his own time he will do so. But power is not his only attribute. It would be rash and absurd to suppose that the great God *will* do every thing that he *can* do. We are sure that he will do what is worthy of himself; but of this his own infinite wisdom is the only competent judge. What is becoming of his perfections and holy government, we can know no further than he is pleased to inform us.

* More generally known amongst us by the name of the Brethren, or Moravians.

But it certainly becomes us to lay our hands upon our mouths, and our mouths in the dust, when we contemplate his conduct. Or, if we do speak, to adopt the apostle's language, "Oh the depths of the riches, both of "the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearch-"able are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: "to whom be glory for ever*."

However, my text is fulfilling, and shall be fulfilled. This joyful sound has already been spread far abroad, in defiance of all attempts to restrain it. Multitudes from age to age have heard it, and found it to be the power of God unto salvation. And it would be easy to prove, if it belonged to my subject, that the superior advantages of civilization which Christendom enjoys, are remotely owing to the knowledge of revelation. To this must be chiefly ascribed the different state of this island from what it was when visited by Julius Cæsar. Yea, our modern philosophers would make but a poor figure, were they despoiled of all the plumes they have borrowed from the book they affect to despise. Further, the purpose of God to save sinners by faith in his beloved Son, is the primary ground of that patience and long-suffering which he still exercises towards such a world as this. And some imperfect traces of this design, transmitted by tradition, are probably to be found, though wofully disfigured, among every nation and people under heaven; which have at least preserved, in a degree, the notices of a right and wrong, and some faint warnings of conscience, in the most savage state of human nature. But, were it not for reasons connected with the designs of his mercy, we can scarcely conceive

* Rom. xi. 33. 36.

that the Holy God would have perpetuated the race of mankind in a state of rebellion and enmity against his government. Or if he had permitted them to multiply, and left them wholly and absolutely to themselves, without interposing some restraints upon their depravity, I believe the inhabitants of the earth would have been no better than incarnate fiends.

The prophecies both of the Old and New Testament, encourage us to hope for a time when the light of Gospel truth will break forth with meridian brightness, the glory of the Lord be revealed, and all flesh shall see his salvation. As a pledge of this, and of the truth of the whole Scripture, we have what may be called a standing miracle continually before our eyes; I mean the state of the Jews, who, though dispersed far and wide among many nations, are every where preserved a distinct and separate people. The history of the world affords no other instance of the like kind. The great monarchies, by which they were successively conquered and scattered, have successively perished. Only the names of them remain. But the people whom they despised, and endeavoured to exterminate, subsist to this day; and, though sifted like corn over the earth, and apparently forsaken of God, are still preserved by his wonderful providence, unaffected by the changes and customs around them; still tenacious of the law of Moses, though the observance of it is rendered impracticable. Many days, many ages they have lived as the prophets foretold they should, without a temple, without sacrifice or priest*. As yet, many Heathen nations are permitted to walk in their own ways. But at length "the fulness of the Gentiles shall "come in, and all Israel shall be saved†." The revolu-

* Hos. iii. 4, 5. † Rom. xi. 25, 26.

tions and commotions in kingdoms and nations, which astonish and perplex politicians, are all bringing forward this great event. The plan of the human drama, to us, who only see a single scene, is dark and intricate; but the catastrophe is approaching: and in the close of the whole, the manifold wisdom of God will be admired and adored, and all holy and happy intelligences will acknowledge with transport, "He has done all things "well."

But the point I am chiefly to press upon my hearers, is, that this word of salvation is sent to you*. How the great Judge will deal with the Heathens, who were never favoured with it, he has not seen fit distinctly to inform us. But thus far he has assured us, that it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon, yea, for Sodom and Gomorrah, than for those who have the privilege of knowing the Gospel, if they reject it†. To them much is given, and of them much will be required. Do not think ministers assuming if they magnify their office. We have no reason to think highly of ourselves. Nor would you be blameable for disregarding us if we spoke in our own names. But if we preach the truth of the Gospel in simplicity and sincerity, then we speak in the name of the Lord, and demand your attention. Do you ask for our authority and commission? Ask your own consciences. If, like Felix, when you mean only to indulge your curiosity by hearing us, you are constrained to tremble‡; if we force upon your mind the remembrance of what you have said or done; if our message makes you uneasy and dissatisfied with yourselves; if you cannot avoid feeling at some times the truth of our principles, and the necessity of the change

* Acts xiii. 26. † Matth. xi. 20—24. ‡ Acts xxiv. 25.

we would press upon you; if, though you have been repeatedly displeased and offended with what you hear, and, perhaps, have gone away purposing or threatening that you would hear it no more, you still appear amongst us,—then you have a sufficient proof that the ministers are sent and authorized to speak to you, and we take your consciences to witness that we preach the truth.

SERMON XXXIII.

OPPOSITION TO MESSIAH UNREASONABLE.

PSALM ii. 1—3.

Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his Anointed: saying, Let us break his bonds asunder, and cast away his cords from us.

IT is generally admitted, that the institutes of Christianity, as contained in the New Testament, do at least exhibit a beautiful and salutary system of morals; and that a sincere compliance with the precepts of our Lord and his apostles would have a good effect upon society. Few infidels have ventured to contradict the common sense of mankind so far as to deny this. Nor can it be denied that the author of this institution, if we judge by the history and character given of him by the evangelists, exemplified, in the highest perfection, by his own conduct, the precepts which he enjoined to his followers. While he lived as a man amongst men, the tenour of *his behaviour* was such as became the friend of mankind.

Though he submitted to a low estate, and often suffered hunger, thirst, and weariness, we do not read of his having wrought a single miracle merely for his own relief. But the wants and calamities of others continually excited his compassion, and engaged his assistance. He gave sight to the blind, health to the sick, and sometimes wiped away the tears of mourners, by restoring their dead to life. He endured hunger himself; but once and again provided food for multitudes, lest they, having nothing to eat, should faint by the way. Nor did he confine his acts of benevolence to his followers, but was easy of access, and granted the request of all indiscriminately who applied to him. "He went about doing "good*," and often put himself in the way of those who would not otherwise have known him. And though he was opposed, calumniated, and laughed to scorn, he continued unwearied and determined in the same cause, bestowing benefits on all around him, as occasions offered, and returning good for evil. May we not with reason ask, why then did Jews and Heathens, priests and people, Scribes and Sadducees, rage so furiously against him, who did nothing amiss, who did all things well? Why did persons of the most opposite interests, parties, and sentiments, who could agree in nothing else, so cordially agree in opposing MESSIAH?

His Gospel breathes the spirit of the great Author, and has a direct tendency to make men happy and useful. Wherever it was published, in the first age, among the Heathens, many of them turned from the worship of dumb idols, to serve the living and true God. It taught and enabled them to renounce "ungodliness and "worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and

* Acts x. 38.

"godly*;" and it still produces the same effects. The world now bears the name of Christian; but under this new and honourable name it retains the same spirit as formerly. Many who are called Christians, are no less under the power of evil tempers and evil habits, than the Heathens to whom the apostles preached. But where the Gospel of the grace of God reaches the heart, a real and observable change is produced. The profane person learns to fear an oath, the libertine is reclaimed, the drunkard becomes sober, and the miser kind. Wherever the truth of the Gospel is known and received, instances may be found of persons who were a terror and a burden to their families, being delivered from the stings of a guilty conscience, from the dominion of headstrong passions, from the slavery of habitual wickedness, and made peaceful, useful, and exemplary members of society, by what the apostle calls the preaching of the cross. And we challenge history to show, that an abiding, consistent reformation, was ever effected by any other doctrine, in a single province, or city, or village, or even in a single family.

What then shall we say of that zeal which kindled the fire of persecution against our Lord and his apostles, and his followers, through a succession of ages?—What is the common principle, the bond of union, which at this day connects people who differ so widely in other respects, and points their displeasure from all sides against this one object? In a former discourse† I briefly mentioned the grounds of that dislike which the Jews manifested to MESSIAH's personal ministry; and I observed that they are deeply rooted in the nature of fallen man, and therefore not peculiar to any

* Titus ii. 12. † Sermon xvii.

one age or nation. The Gospel always did, and always will, produce the same happy change in those who receive it; and provoke the same opposition and resentment in those who do not. The actings will be different as circumstances vary, but the principle is universally the same. In this Island, which the good providence of God has distinguished by many signal and peculiar favours, the spirit of our constitution and government is friendly to liberty of conscience and the rights of private judgment; so that our religious profession does not expose us to the penalties of fire and sword, stripes or tortures, imprisonment or banishment. Such trials have been the lot of our forefathers; when the servants of God, under the names of Gospelers or Puritans, were treated as heretics of the worst sort. We are bound to acknowledge with thankfulness the blessings of religious and civil liberty which we enjoy. But the world at large around us is not more favourably disposed to the grace and rule of MESSIAH's kingdom, than it was in the days of Heathen and Popish darkness. The tongue at least is unrestrained, and out of the abundance of the heart the mouth will speak. The Gospel offends the pride of men, by considering them all on a level, as sinners in the sight of God; and by proposing only one method of salvation, without admitting any difference of plea or character. It offends them likewise by its strictness. Like Herod, they might perhaps consent to do many things*, if they were left at liberty to please themselves in others, in which, though expressly contrary to the will of God, they will not submit to be controlled; and therefore they are much displeased with the Gospel, which, by

* Mark vi. 20.

affording no allowance or connivance to the least known sin, but prescribing a rule of universal holiness, crosses their inclinations and favourite interests. When Paul preached at Ephesus, Demetrius and his companions perceived that their craft was in danger. This was the real cause of their anger, but they were ashamed to avow it; and therefore their ostensible reason of opposing him was of a religious kind*, and they professed a great concern for the honour of Diana. Few perhaps would have given themselves much trouble to promote or preserve the gain of the craftsmen; but a pretended regard for the worship which had been long established, was a popular topic, which wrought powerfully upon the superstition of the ignorant multitude, and thousands were presently induced to join with them in the cry, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians."

The like arts are still practised with the like success. The same secret motives are disguised by the same plausible pretences. The deceitfulness and wickedness of the heart appears in no one instance more plainly than in the cavils which are repeated and multiplied against the grace of the Gospel. When we preach a free salvation by faith in Jesus, and propose his obedience unto death, as the sure and only ground of acceptance with God; when we say in the words of the apostle, to the vilest of sinners who feel the burden, and fear the consequences of their sins, "believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved†," an alarm is raised, and a concern pretended for the interests of morality. The doctrine of salvation by faith only is charged with opening a door, a flood-gate, for licentiousness; and it is supposed, that if this doctrine

* Acts xix. 28. † Acts xvi. 31.

be true, people may live as they please, and still comfort themselves with the expectation of heaven at last. Considering our natural propensity to trust in ourselves that we are righteous, I do not wonder that persons who are comparatively sober and decent should speak thus, while they are ignorant of the strictness of the holy law of God, and of the depravity of their own hearts. But I sometimes wonder that they are not a little disconcerted, by the characters of many, (so different from what they suppose their own to be,) who join with them in the objections they make. For in this point, with the sober and decent, the licentious and profligate readily concur; and whoremongers, adulterers, drunkards, and profane swearers, almost equal them in gravely expressing their apprehensions, that the doctrine of salvation by grace will prove very unfavourable to the practice of good works. How very remarkable is this—that the virtuous and the vile, the most respectable and the most infamous people, should so frequently agree in sentiment, and unite in opposing the Gospel, professedly from the same motive. But thus it was at the commencement of MESSIAH's kingdom: kings, rulers, priests, and people, all conspired and raged against him. Herod and Pilot, the Jewish elders and the Roman soldiers, the Pharisees and the Sadducees thus differed, and thus agreed. They hated each other till he appeared; but their greater common hatred to him made them act in concert, and they suspended their mutual animosity, that they might combine to destroy him.

I may seem to have digressed from the immediate scope of my text; but I judge it proper to bring the subject home to ourselves. If I confined myself to prove that the enemies of our Lord, when he was upon

earth, were very unreasonable and unjust in treating him as they did, I should have an easy task, and, I suppose, the ready assent of all my hearers. But there may be persons present, who, though they little suspect themselves, are equally misled by prejudices; and, under a semblance of zeal for a form of godliness, oppose the truth and power of it upon the same principles, and in the same spirit, as the Jews and Heathens did of old. The Jews who condemned MESSIAH to death, blamed their forefathers for persecuting the prophets who foretold his appearance*; but their own conduct towards him was a proof, that had they lived in the days of the prophets, they would have acted as their fathers had done. So the resentment that many, who bear the Christian name in this day, discover against the doctrines of the Gospel, and against the people who profess them, is a proof that they would have concurred with those who crucified the Lord of glory, had they lived in Jerusalem at that time.

In this prophecy, David, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, speaks of the future as actually present. He saw the resistance that would be made to the person and kingdom of MESSIAH by the powers of the world; that they would employ their force and policy to withstand and suppress the decree and appointment of God. The question, "Why?" implies that their opposition would be both groundless and ineffectual.

1. It was entirely groundless and unreasonable. MESSIAH was indeed a king, and he came to set up a kingdom that should endure for ever. But his kingdom is not of this world; and, if rightly understood, would give no umbrage to human governments. It

* Matth. xxiii. 30, 31.

does not interfere with the rights of princes. His subjects are indeed primarily bound by the laws of their immediate King, and they must "obey God rather "than man*," if man will presume to enjoin such laws as contradict his known will. But with this exception, it is a part of the duty they owe to their Lord, to obey those whom he has placed, by his providence, in authority over them. The kingdom of MESSIAH has little to do with what we call politics. His people are taught "to render to Cæsar the things that are "Cæsar's†," and to yield a peaceful subjection to the powers that be, under whatever form of government their lot may be cast. They "are strangers and pil-"grims upon earth‡," their citizenship, treasures, and conversation, are in heaven; and they have no more direct concern with the intrigues and parties of politicians, than a traveller has in the feuds and disturbances which may happen in a foreign country through which he is passing. They are to obey God, they are to obey kings and governors in subordination to God, they are to render to all their due; "tribute to whom "tribute, custom, to whom custom, honour to whom "honour§." But where they cannot comply with the laws of government without breaking the laws of God, then they are not to obey, but to suffer patiently, committing their cause to him whom they serve; well knowing that he is able to protect or relieve them, so far as his wisdom judges it fit, and to make them abundant amends for all they can suffer for his sake. I am not a direct advocate for the doctrines of passive obedience and non-resistance in the largest sense. I set

* Acts v. 29.
† Matth. xxii. 21.
‡ 1 Pet. ii. 11.
§ Rom. xiii. 1—

a great value upon the blessings of civil and religious liberty; I reverence the constitutional rights of nations, particularly of our own. But they are all dependent upon the will of our Lord; and I know not by what means they can be preserved to a people, when their sins have made them ripe for judgment. But "let the dead "bury their dead*." God will never want instruments, when it is his pleasure to relieve the oppressed, or to abase the proud. For these purposes he over-rules the counsels and affairs of men, pours contempt upon the designs of princes, and takes the wise in their own craftiness. The subjects of his spiritual kingdom have only to commit their cause to him, to wait upon him, to observe and to admire his management. Their best interest is always safe. And even the troubles they meet with, are appointed for their good. But if they so far conform to the world, as to take an active and decided part in the disputes and contentions around them, they usually dishonour their Christian character, and obstruct their own peace and comfort. There may possibly be some exceptions. God may sometimes place a servant of his, by the leading of his providence, in a post of high political importance, as he did Joseph and Daniel, but I believe such instances are few; and if any venture of their own accord beyond the proper line of their calling as Christians, the event is usually grief and loss to them. They are described in his word, as those "who are quiet in the land†," and such should be their deportment.

We are sure it was thus, in the first and golden days of Christianity. The Roman government was then absolute, arbitrary, and oppressive. Tiberius, Caligula,

* Matth. viii. 22. † Psal. xxxv. 20.

Nero, and others, who presided over it, and bore the name of Roman emperors, were beyond measure vile and abominable: one of them was by a decree of the Roman senate, sentenced to death as a public enemy to mankind—but the Christians neither disputed their right, nor disobeyed their authority. Kings and rulers, therefore, have nothing to fear from the Gospel of Christ. The maxims of sound policy would engage all their influence in facilitating its progress; for true Christians will assuredly be good subjects. Impatience of subordination, contempt of lawful authority, tumults, riots, and conspiracies, are evils which would have no place if the Gospel was generally received. But princes have been usually exposed to the flattery of designing men, who, by their arts and misrepresentations, have seduced them to act contrary to their true interests. Their mistaken efforts to suppress that cause, which, if maintained, would have been the best security of their thrones, have often stained the annals of their reign with innocent blood, and filled their dominions with misery. History furnishes many instances of kings, who might otherwise have lived beloved and died lamented, that have involved themselves and their families in the calamities with which they unjustly punished those who deserved their protection. For,

2. Opposition to Messiah and his kingdom is no less vain and ineffectual, than unreasonable and groundless. Nor is it vain only, but ruinous to those who engage in it. What did the Jews build when they rejected the foundation-stone which God had laid in Zion? They acted, as they thought, with precaution and foresight. They said, "If we let him thus alone, "all men will believe on him; and the Romans shall "come and take away both our place and our

"tion*." Foolish politicians! Did they preserve their city by crucifying the Son of God? The very evil they feared came upon them; or rather, being abandoned of God to their own counsels, they brought it upon themselves. In a few years the Romans, with whom they appeared so desirous to keep upon good terms, destroyed their city with an unheard-of destruction, and exterminated them from the land. This was an emblem of the inevitable, total, irreparable ruin, which awaits all those who persist in rejecting the rule of MESSIAH. The nation, the individual, that will not serve him, must surely perish.

Ah! if sinners did but know what the bonds and cords are, which they are so determined to break; if they knew that "his service is perfect freedom;" if they were aware what more dreadful bonds and chains they are rivetting upon themselves, by refusing his easy yoke, they would throw down their arms and submit. They think, if they yield to the Gospel, they must bid adieu to pleasure. But what will become of their pleasure, when, the day of his forbearance being expired, he will speak to them in his wrath, and fill them with hopeless horror and dismay?

Bless the Lord, ye favoured few, whose eyes are opened, whose hearts are softened, and who are become the willing people of this Saviour. Yet a little while and he will appear again, and then you also shall appear with him in glory!

* John xi. 48.

SERMON XXXIV.

OPPOSITION TO MESSIAH IN VAIN.

PSALM ii. 4.

He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision.

THE extent and efficacy of the depravity of mankind, cannot be fully estimated by the conduct of Heathens destitute of divine revelation. We may say of the Gospel, in one sense, what the apostle says of the law, "It entered that sin might abound*." It afforded occasion for displaying the alienation of the heart of man from the blessed God in the strongest light. The sensuality, oppression, and idolatry which have prevailed in all ages, sufficiently prove the wickedness of men to be very great. But the opposition which they who have rebelled against the government of their Creator, make to the proposals of his grace, is a proof still more striking. If sin has so hardened their hearts, and blinded their eyes, that of themselves they neither can nor will implore his mercy; yet it might be thought that if the Great God, whom they have so heinously offended, should be pleased, of his own goodness, to make the first overtures of reconciliation, and to invite them to receive pardon, they would gladly attend to his gracious declaration; especially when they are informed, that to preserve them from perishing, he gave up his

* Rom. v. 20.

only Son to sufferings and death. But when they not only defy his power but insult his goodness; when they reject and blaspheme the Saviour whom he commends to them; when they are but the more exasperated by his tenders of mercy; when they scorn his message, and persecute his messengers by whom he entreats them to be reconciled; this mad and ungrateful carriage shows such a rooted enmity against God in fallen men, as even the fallen angels are not capable of discovering. For MESSIAH "took not on him the na-"ture of angels," nor did he make proposals of mercy to them. But he did take upon him our nature. He visited us in person; for us he lived a sufferer, and died that we might live. The prophets foresaw and foretold the reception he would meet with, and their predictions were fulfilled. The Jews who professed to expect him, and the Heathens who had not heard of him, united their utmost efforts to withstand and defeat the purposes of his unexampled love. What must the holy angels think of the baseness, presumption, and obstinacy of such creatures!

But rebellion against God is not only wickedness, but folly and infatuation in the extreme. "Whoever "hardened himself against the Lord and prospered*?" He whom they opposed, and against whom they thought they had prevailed when they saw him dead upon the cross, soon resumed his glory, and his throne. The text therefore principally respects the opposition made to his Gospel and to his kingdom after his ascension, which is still carrying on, but which always was, and always will be, in vain. The words I have read offer

* Job ix. 4.

two points for the consolation of those who love him, and for the timely consideration of those who have hitherto disregarded him.

I. That "he sitteth in the heavens."

II. The notice he taketh of his enemies. He smiles at their rage, and treats both their power and their policy with contempt.

I. He whom God has anointed, (therefore called MESSIAH,) he against whom kings and rulers, nations and the people rage, "sitteth in the heavens." He has finished his great work, and entered into his rest; having by himself "purged our sins," he is immovably seated on his throne, "at the right hand of the Ma-"jesty on high*." He is the Head, King, and Lord of principalities, dominions, and powers, possessed of all authority, unchangeably fixed over all, "God blessed for "evermore†." In this character he is the Representative, High Priest, Advocate, and Shepherd of all who put their trust in him. He is ever mindful of them. While he is preparing a place for them near himself, by the power of his Spirit he maintains an intercourse with them, and manifests himself to them as he does not to the world. By his providence, which ruleth over all, he manages their concerns upon earth, supplies their wants, and gives them present and effectual help and support in their time of trouble. To him their eyes and hearts are directed, "they look to him and are enlightened‡," strengthened, and comforted. And under his protection they are safe. He having taken charge of them, and engaged to save them to the uttermost, "no weapon "formed against them can prosper." Now they may draw nigh to God with boldness, for they have One

* Heb. i. 3. † Rom. ix. 5. ‡ Psalm xxxiv. 5.

" who ever liveth to make intercession for them." Now they may lay aside all anxious uneasy cares, for they have a mighty Friend who careth for them. Now they may say each one for himself, " I will trust and not be " afraid, for the Lord Jehovah is my strength, and my " song, and my salvation*." Whether you have indeed fled to him for refuge as the hope set before you, committed your soul to him, and accepted him in all his offices, as your Prophet, Priest, and King, is a point of experience. If you have, he knows it, for he enabled you to do it; and he will not disappoint the hope and expectation which he himself has wrought in you. If you have, methinks you must know it likewise. Have you not done it more than once? Do you not daily repeat this surrender of yourself to him? It is certainly possible to assent to the truths of the Gospel, considered merely as doctrines or propositions, yea, to plead and dispute for them with much seeming earnestness, and yet to be entirely a stranger to their power. But I trust that they to whom I now speak will understand me. Our Lord reminded Nathanael of what had passed under the fig-tree†, when he thought himself alone. Do not I remind you of seasons when no eye but the eye of Him who seeth in secret was upon you? Did not you then and there, once and again, accept him as your Saviour upon the warrant of his own word, devote yourself to his service, resign yourself to his disposal, and intrust yourself to his care? Then fear not. He that sitteth in the heavens is on your side. If the premises be well grounded, the inference is sure. And though many may rise up against you, they shall not

* Isa. xii. 2. † John i. 48.

prevail; for he will "teach your hands to war, and your "fingers to fight," will cover your "head in the day "of battle," and in the end "make you more than "conqueror." For the battle is not yours, but the Lord's. Your enemies are his, and his cause is yours. They who associate against him shall be dashed in pieces, as the billows break and die upon a rocky shore.

II. The feebleness and insignificance of their rage against MESSIAH, is intimated by the manner in which he notices their proceedings. "He holds them in derision, "he laughs them to scorn." He has them perfectly under his control, holds them in a chain when they think themselves most at liberty, appoints the bounds beyond which they cannot pass, and can in a moment check them, and make them feel his hook and bridle, when in the height of their career.

It is the Lord's pleasure not only to favour and to support his people, but to do it in such a way that it may appear to be wholly his own work, and that the praise belongs to him alone. And therefore he permits their enemies for a season to try if they can prevent his designs. For a season, things take such a course that their attempts seem to prosper; they threaten, they boast, and confidently expect to carry their point. But the contest always issues in their shame and confusion. He not only disconcerts their schemes, but makes them instrumental to the promoting of his own designs. Thus when he sent Moses to deliver Israel from Egypt, Pharaoh, instead of complying with his command, increased their burdens, added to the rigour of their bondage, and, though rebuked by the succession of severe judgments, he hardened himself the more, and was determined to detain them if he could. But he could

not detain them a day or an hour beyond the appointed time, which God had long before made known to Abraham*. Then they were delivered, and Pharaoh and his host overthrown in the Red Sea. Hereby the name of the God of Israel was more known, noticed, and magnified, than it would have been, if Pharaoh had dismissed the people without reluctance or delay.

In like manner, when MESSIAH left the earth, his followers were considered as sheep without a shepherd. The world conspired to suppress his cause, and to root out the remembrance of his people. But the methods they employed counteracted their own designs. They who were dispersed by the persecution that followed the death of Stephen, preached the word wherever they went, the Gospel spread from place to place, and the number of disciples daily increased. So that the Jewish rulers soon found themselves unequal to the task, and foreboded their own disappointment, "doubting whereunto these "things would grow†." In some cases the Lord signally interposed, and showed how entirely the lives and the hearts of his adversaries were in his hands. The haughty Herod was suddenly smitten by an invisible hand, with a loathsome and mortal disease‡. He fell devoured by worms: but the success of the Gospel which he had presumed to withstand, greatly increased and spread. The furious zeal of Saul of Tarsus§ against the truth, was silenced in a different manner. Jesus, whom he ignorantly persecuted, appeared to him in the way to Damascus, when he was "breathing out "threatenings and slaughter against the disciples," disarmed his rage, made him a monument of his mercy,

* Exod. xii. 41, 42.
† Acts v. 24.
‡ Acts xii. 23.
§ Acts ix.

and an earnest and successful preacher of the faith he had laboured to destroy.

From the Jews, the business was transferred to the Heathens, whose opposition was no less unavailing. Though they sometimes affected to boast that they had suppressed the Christian name, the Gospel was propagated in defiance of their attempts to prevent it. The worst and the best of the Roman emperors were alike industrious, and alike unsuccessful, in their endeavours to stifle the work of God. At length, in the reign of Constantine, the Christian religion obtained the sanction and protection of imperial authority.

But it soon appeared that the religion of the New Testament gained little advantage by this revolution. Though the worship of Heathen idols gradually declined, and sunk into disrepute, the bulk of the people of all ranks were only changed in name. The world still lay in wickedness*, and true Christianity was still exposed to persecution. When the name of Christian ceased to be invidious and despicable, new names were soon invented to stigmatize the real servants of God; and ecclesiastical power gradually increased, till the mystery of iniquity reigned for ages in the temple of God. The persecutions of Popery equalled and exceeded those of Paganism. And they who aspired to be Christians indeed, were constrained, like the worthies of old, to "wander on mountains and in deserts," to hide themselves "in dens and caves of the earth†." Yet, under all disadvantages, there was still a remnant, according to the election of grace, who could not be compelled to wear the mark of the beast. And while persecutors, who could only kill the body, seemed to weaken the church

* 1 John v. 19. † 1 Heb. xi. 38.

militant, they increased the number and the songs of the church triumphant.

To appearance the church of Christ was often brought low. It was very low at the time of the Reformation. But then it was suddenly revived, and broke forth like the sun from behind a dark cloud; and the light of the Gospel was diffused far and wide, almost as at the beginning, in the apostles' days. But Protestants were quickly actuated by the same spirit as their Popish and Pagan predecessors had been. The form of Christianity was professed and protected, and the power of it denied and opposed. And to this day it remains a truth, verified by experience, "that all who will live godly in "Christ Jesus, must," in one way or other, "suffer per-"secution*."

Of late years the sanguinary spirit which, under pretence of doing God service, destroyed his people by fire and tortures, is much subsided. We live in a time when great pretences are made to candour and moderation. We have reason to be thankful for our religious liberty, to the good providence of God. But, so far as men are concerned, we are not indebted for it to a just sense and acknowledgment of the right of private judgment, but to the prevalence of sceptical indifference and infidelity. The religion of the Gospel was, perhaps, never more despised and hated than at present. We seem to be returning apace to the state of the primitive ages, when there were but two sorts of persons, Christians and infidels. But, nothwithstanding all the arts and assaults of men, whether open enemies or pretended friends, the Bible is still extant, the Gospel is still preached, yea, is still spreading. The Lord has always

* 2 Tim. iii. 12.

had a people, though they have been often hidden from the general notice and observation of men. "He that "sitteth in the heavens" laughs his opposers to scorn, and maintains his own cause in defiance of them all.

Surely if this work was not of God, the united efforts of kings, councils, popes, philosophers, the great, the wise, the decent, and the profligate, must have overthrown it long ago. If a miracle be demanded in proof of Christianity, behold one! Though the world has been raging and plotting against it, from its first appearance; though it has been fiercely assaulted by those without, and shamefully betrayed by many within, it still subsists, it still flourishes. And subsist it shall, for it is maintained by Him who has the hearts of all men in his hands, and can control or change them as he pleases. He can, and he will, support and strengthen his people under all their sufferings. He can disappoint his adversaries by unexpected events, divide them among themselves, and so manage them, by his providence, as to make them protect and promote the very cause which they hate. And whenever he pleases, he can, as it were, from the stones*, raise up instruments to carry on his work, and to show forth his praise. Therefore,

1. Let not his people tremble for the ark. Our eyes, indeed, should affect our hearts. It becomes us to be jealous for the Lord of hosts, to be concerned for the contempt and dishonour that is cast upon his government and grace, to be grieved for the abounding abominations of the day, and to pity and pray for obstinate sinners who know not what they do. But we need not fear the failure of his promise. His truth and

* Matth. iii. 9.

honour are engaged for the success of his Gospel, and they must stand or fall together. It is a cause dearer to him than it can be to us. The manifestation of his glory in the salvation of sinners by the doctrine of the cross, is the one great concern, for which the succession of day and night, and of the seasons of the year, is continued, and the visible frame of nature is preserved. "He will work, and none shall let it. The kingdoms "of the earth shall become the kingdoms of the Lord "and of his Christ. The fulness of the Gentiles shall "come in, and the dispersed of Israel shall return to "the Lord their God, and be saved." These great events to those who judge by an eye of sense, and according to the present state of things, may appear improbable or impossible. But "the Lord of hosts hath "purposed, and who shall disannul it? his hand is "stretched out, and who shall turn it back*?"

2. Think it neither strange nor hard, if any of you are called to suffer for the sake of the truth. Think it not strange; for thus it has been from the beginning. Think it not hard; for our sufferings are small, if compared with the lot of many who have lived before us. We are not called to "resist unto blood." Many prophets and righteous men have desired to see such days of liberty as we are favoured with, but have not seen them.

3. Consider seriously, "Who is on the Lord's side?" He is the strongest side, and must prevail. If you have yielded yourselves to him, and taken upon you his yoke, your best interests are safe, your final happiness is secured. Nothing can separate you from his love. You shall be kept by his power through faith, "and

* Isa. xiv. 27.

" no weapon formed against you shall prosper." But if you are against him, tremble, for the day of his wrath will come, it will " burn like an oven, and all the " proud, and all that do wickedly shall be as stubble, " and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith " the Lord of hosts, and shall leave them neither root " nor branch *." Turn therefore in time from your evil ways, submit yourselves unto him, and implore his mercy while he waiteth to be gracious, " that iniquity " may not be your ruin."

SERMON XXXV.

OPPOSITION TO MESSIAH RUINOUS.

PSALM ii. 9.

Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.

THERE is a species of the sublime in writing, which seems peculiar to the Scripture, and of which, properly, no subjects but those of divine revelation are capable. With us things inconsiderable in themselves are elevated by splendid images, which give them an apparent importance beyond what they can justly claim. Thus the poet, when describing a battle among bees, by a judicious selection of epithets and figures, excites in the minds of his readers the idea of two mighty armies contending for empire. But the works and ways of God are too great in themselves to admit of any height-

* Mal. iv. 1.

ening representation. *We* conceive more forcibly of small things by illustrations borrowed from those which are greater; but the Scripture frequently illustrates great things, by contrasting them with those which in our estimation are trivial and feeble. One instance, out of many which might be mentioned, is that truly sublime passage of the prophet, "And all the host of "heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be "rolled together as a scroll; and all their host shall "fall down, as the leaf falleth off from the vine, and as "a falling fig from the fig-tree*." The apostle, when favoured with a heavenly vision, introduces the same thought, almost in the same words, "And the stars of "heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig-tree casteth "her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty "wind: and the heavens departed as a scroll when it "is rolled together†." Such forms of expression are becoming the Majesty of the great God, before whom the difference between the great and the small in our judgment, is annihilated. In his view, the earth, with all its inhabitants, are but as a drop which falls unnoticed from the bucket, or as the dust which cleaves to the balance‡, without affecting its equilibrium. At the same time, the simplicity of these illustrations, so well suited to confound the pride of the wise, is striking and obvious to the lowest capacities. If Homer or Virgil had been to describe the exertion and effect of the power of God, in subduing and punishing his enemies, they would probably have laboured for a simile sufficiently grand. But I much question if they would have thought of the image in my text, though none can be more expressive of utter, irreparable ruin, or of the ease

* Isa. xxxiv. 4. † Rev. vi. 13, 14. ‡ Isa. xl. 15.

with which it is accomplished. "He shall dash them "in pieces like a potter's vessel."

The series of the passages we have lately considered, is very regular and beautiful. MESSIAH "ascended "on high, and received gifts for men*." The first and immediate consequence of his exaltation in our nature, is the publication of the Gospel. Then follows the happy and beneficial influence of the Gospel on those who thankfully receive it. "How beautiful are the "feet of them that preach these glad tidings." The next passage secures and describes its extensive progress. "The sound went forth into all the earth." "The opposition awakened by it is then described, first, as unreasonable, "Why do the Heathen rage?" Secondly, as ineffectual, "The Lord laughs" at his opposers; he sits upon his immovable throne, and derides their attempts. Thirdly, the final issue of their mad resistance, their confusion and ruin, is the subject of the verse I have read, which prepares for the close of the second part of the Oratorio. His enemies shall perish, his kingdom shall be established and consummated; and then all holy intelligent beings shall join in a song of triumph, "Hallelujah, for the Lord God "Omnipotent reigneth."

The two expressions, of breaking with a rod of iron, and dashing in pieces, suggest nearly the same idea: but as elsewhere he is said, to "rule" his enemies "with a rod of iron†," I shall avail myself of this variation, in order to give you a more complete view of the dreadful state of those who oppose MESSIAH and his kingdom. He rules them at present "with a rod of

* Psal. lxviii. 18. † Rev. xix. 15.

" iron," and hereafter he will " dash them in pieces like " a potter's vessel." Let us, therefore, consider,

I. How the Lord MESSIAH rules over impenitent and obstinate sinners in the present life. They attempt, in vain, to withdraw from his subjection; they oppose his holy will; they refuse to submit to his golden sceptre: he will, therefore, " rule them with a rod of iron." For though they boast of their liberty, and presume to say, " Who is Lord over us*?" yet, in the thing wherein they speak proudly, " he is above them†:" They cannot hide themselves from his notice, nor avoid the intimations of his displeasure.

1. One branch of his iron rule over them, consists in that certain and inseparable connexion which he has established between sin and misery. " The fruit of " righteousness is peace‡." They who live in the fear of the Lord, and yield a willing obedience to his word, not only possess peace of conscience, and a hope which can look with comfort beyond the grave; but are thereby preserved from innumerable evils, into which they who attempt to cast off his yoke unavoidably plunge themselves. On the contrary, " the way of " transgressors is hard§." It is hard in itself, if we set aside, for a moment, the consideration of the dreadful end to which it leads. Could you see what passes within the breast of a man who disdains to be governed by the rule of God's word, you would see his heart torn to pieces by the clamorous, insatiable demands of the various, violent, inconsistent appetites and passions, which, like so many wild beasts, are continually prey-

* Psal. xii. 4. † Exod. xviii. 11.
‡ James iii. 18. § Prov. xiii. 15.

ing upon him. Not one of them can be fully gratified, much less all, for many of them are diametrically opposite to each other. The boilings of anger, the gnawings of envy, the thirst of covetousness, the anxieties attendant on pride and ambition, must make the mind that is subject to them miserable. "There is no peace "to the wicked;" there can be none. Further, their evil tempers and irregular desires produce outward and visible effects, which publicly and manifestly prove, that the service of sin is a hard drudgery, and that whatever pleasure it may seem to promise, its pay is misery and pain. "Who hath wo, contentions, and "wounds without cause*?" The drunkard. Lewdness and drunkenness are high roads, if I may so speak, leading to infamy, disease, penury, and death. Such persons do not live out half the days which their constitutions might have afforded, if they had not sold themselves to do wickedly. Again, look into their houses. Where the Lord does not dwell, peace will not inhabit. How frequently may we observe, in their family connexions, discord and enmity between man and wife, unkind parents, disobedient children, tyrannical masters, and treacherous servants! Thus they live, "hateful in themselves, and hating one another†." If they have what the world accounts prosperity, their hard master, Satan, so works upon their evil dispositions, that they can derive no real comfort from it.—Every day, almost every hour, puts some new bitterness into their cup. And in trouble they have no resource: having no access to God, no promise to support them, no relief from him against their anxieties and fears; they either sink down in sullen, comfortless

* Prov. xxiii. 29. † Tit. iii. 3.

despondency, or, in a spirit of wild rebellion, "blas-"pheme him because of their plagues*." In society they are dreaded and avoided by the sober and serious, and can associate only with such as themselves. There indeed, they will pretend to be happy; they carouse and make a noise, and assist each other to banish reflection; yet frequently the drink, or the devil, break their intimacies, and stir them up to quarrels, broils, and mischief. Such is a life of sin. "The Lord "rules them with a rod of iron." They renounce his fear, and he refuses them his blessing. Nothing more is necessary to render them miserable, than to leave them to themselves.

2. "He rules them with a rod of iron," by his power over conscience. They may boast and laugh, but we know the gall and bitterness of their state; for we likewise were in it, until the Lord delivered us. Let them say what they will, we are sure that there are seasons when like him whom they serve, "they be-"lieve and tremble†." They cannot always be in company, they cannot always be intoxicated; though this is the very reason why many intoxicate themselves so often, because they cannot bear their own thoughts when sober. They are then a burden and a terror to themselves. They feel the iron rod. How awful are the thoughts which sometimes awaken them, or keep them awake, in the silent hours of the night! What terrors seize them in sickness, or when they are compelled to think of death! What a death-warrant do they often receive in their souls, under the preaching of that word of God, which fills his people with joy and peace! Many will not hear it. But why not? They

* Rev. xvi. 21. † James ii. 19.

will not, because they dare not. I am persuaded there are more than a few of the brave spirits of the present day, who would willingly change conditions with a dog; and be glad to part with their reason, if they could at the same time get rid of the horrors which haunt their consciences. Is there one such person here? Let me entreat you to stop and consider, before it be too late. There is yet forgiveness with God. Your case, though dangerous, is not desperate, if you do not make it so yourself. I would direct your thoughts to Jesus. Look to him, and implore his mercy. His blood can cleanse from all sin. He is able to save to the uttermost.

It is possible some may affect to contradict the representation I have made, and be ready to say, "I find "nothing of all this. I take a pleasure in my way. I "have a healthy body, money at my command, and I "can sleep soundly. I feel none of the qualms of "conscience you speak of; and though the saints and "good folks care as little for me as I do for them, yet "I am very well and happy with such acquaintance as "I like best. As to an hereafter, I do not think of it; "but I am determined to live now." In answer to sentiments of this kind, which I am afraid are too common, I observe,

3. That the amazing hardness and blindness of heart to which some sinners are given up, is another, and the most terrible, effect "of that iron rod" with which the Lord "rules his enemies." Pharaoh could say as positively as you, "Who is the Lord, that I should "obey him*?" But because being often rebuked, he persisted in his obstinacy, the contest terminated in his destruction. If you are obstinate like him now, I

* Exod. v. 2.

believe you were not always so. You must have laboured hard, you must have resisted the light of truth, and have stifled many a conviction, before you could arrive to this pitch of obduracy. You have fought against the Holy Spirit: and wo unto you, if he be gone, gone for ever, and will strive with you no more. To be thus given up of God to a reprobate mind, is the heaviest judgment that a sinner can be visited with on this side of hell. I am at a loss what to say to a person thus disposed, and I hope there are none such present. But I would warn those who, though they have sinned with a high hand, are not yet altogether past feeling, lest you fall into such a state of confirmed disobedience and unbelief. "Take heed, lest you be hard-"ened through the deceitfulness of sin*." If under the light of the Gospel you can go on in a course of wilful, wanton, deliberate wickedness, you are upon the very edge of the unpardonable sin, of that state from which it is impossible to renew you to repentance. If the Bible be, as you vainly wish it may prove, "a cun-"ningly-devised fable," you may trample upon it with impunity, and laugh on securely to the end of life. But if it be true, remember you have been this day warned of the consequences of despising it. If you will perish, I am clear of your blood.

II. I proceed to consider the final issue of this unequal contest between the worms of the earth and their Maker. "He will dash them in pieces like a potter's "vessel." Such a vessel may be curiously wrought, and appear beautiful to the eye; but it is frail, easily broken, and when once broken to pieces, it is irreparable. It is therefore a fit emblem of mortal man in his

* Heb. iii. 13.

best estate. "We are fearfully and wonderfully made*." The texture of the human frame is admirable. The natural capacities of the mind of man, the powers of his understanding, will, and affections, the rapidity of imagination, the comprehension of memory, especially in some instances, are so many proofs, that, considered as a creature of God, he is a noble creature; and, though he is debased and degraded by sin, there are traces of his original excellence remaining, sufficient to denominate him, in the words of the poet, "majestic though "in ruins." But if you suppose him rich, powerful, wise, in the common sense of the words, he is brittle as "a potter's vessel;" and, while possessed of every possible advantage, he is but like the grass or the flower of the field, which, in its most flourishing state, falls in a moment at the stroke of the scythe, and withers and dies. A fever, a fall, a tile, a grain of sand, or the air that finds its way through a crevice, may be an overmatch for the strongest man, and bring him down hastily to the grave. By a small change in the brain, or some part of the nervous system, he who now prides himself in his intellectual abilities, may soon become a lunatic or an idiot. Disease may quickly render the beauty loathsome, and the robust weak as infancy. There are earthen or china vessels which might possibly endure for many ages, if carefully preserved from violence. But the seeds of decay and death are sown in our very frame. We are crushed before the moth, and moulder away untouched, under the weight of time. How surely and inevitably then must they whom the Lord strikes with his iron rod, be shattered with the blow!

* Psal. cxxxix. 14.

Communities and collective bodies of men are in his hand, no less frail than individuals. The first-born throughout Egypt, and the vast army of Sennacherib, perished in a night. The Romans were the iron rod in his hand, wherewith he dashed the Jewish nation to pieces. Their fragments are scattered far and wide to this day, and who can gather them up? The Roman empire was likewise dashed to pieces in its turn; and such has been the end successively of many powers, and of many persons, who have presumed to oppose his designs. For a while they were permitted to rage and plot, and strive; but at length they stumbled and fell, and their memory is perished.

But it is proper to bring the consideration nearer home. I have been informed, that the music to which this passage is set, is so well adapted to the idea it expresses, as in a manner to startle those who hear it.—They who live in sinful habits, regardless of the Gospel, would be startled, indeed, if they were duly sensible how directly the words apply to their own situation, and that the Psalmist describes the manner in which God will treat them if they continue impenitent. If we could see all that passes upon dying beds, we should often see the false peace and vain hopes of sinners dashed to pieces when eternity is opening upon their view. We shall certainly see the solemnity of the great day: "For we must all, appear" not only as spectators, but as parties nearly interested in the proceedings, "before the judgment-seat of Christ." "Behold, he "cometh in the clouds, and every eye shall see him, "and they also who pierced him!" He will "de-"scend with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, "and with the trump of God," and "before him shall be "*gathered* all nations." Where then shall the sinner and

the ungodly appear? What will then become of those who despise, and those who abuse, the Gospel of the grace of God? The libertine, the infidel, the apostate, the hypocrite, the profane scoffer, and the false professor, how will they stand, or whither will they flee, when the great Judge shall sit upon his awful throne, and the books shall be opened, and every secret thing shall be disclosed? Alas! for them that "are full," and "that laugh now, for then they shall pine and mourn*." Then their cavils will be silenced, their guilt, with all its aggravations, be charged home upon them, and no plea, no advocate, be found. Can their hearts endure, or their hands be strong, when he shall speak to them in his wrath, and say, "Depart from me, ye cursed, "into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his "angels?"

But let them who love his name rejoice. You have fled for refuge to the hope set before you. To you his appearance will be delightful, and his voice welcome. You shall not be ashamed. This awful God is yours. He will then own and accept you before assembled worlds, and will say, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, "inherit the kingdom prepared for you." Then "the "days of your mourning shall be ended, and your sun "shall go down no more†."

* Luke vi. 25. † Matth. xxv. 34.; Isa. lx. 20.

SERMON XXXVI.

THE LORD REIGNETH.

REV. xix. 6.

Hallelujah; for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth.

THE book of the Revelation, being chiefly prophetical, will not perhaps be fully understood, till the final accomplishment of the events shall draw near, and throw a stronger light upon the whole series. But, while the learned commentators have been hitherto divided and perplexed in their attempts to illustrate many parts of it, there are other parts well adapted for the instruction and refreshment of plain Christians; particularly those passages in which the scenery and images seemed designed to give us some representation of the happiness and worship of the heavenly state. Thus a plain, unlettered believer, when reading with attention the fourth and fifth chapters, though he cannot give a reason why the elders are four-and-twenty, the living creatures four, and the number of their wings neither more nor less than six; yet, from the whole description of the Lamb upon the throne, the songs of the redeemed, and the chorus of the angels, he receives such an impression of glory, as awakens his gratitude, desire, and joy, and excites him likewise to take up the same song of praise "to him who has loved him, and washed him from his "sins in his own blood." He is content to leave the discussion of hard questions to learned men, while he feeds by faith upon those simple truths which can be relished only by a spiritual taste; and which, where there

is such a taste, make their way to the heart, without the assistance of critical disquisition.

The subject of the preceding chapter, is the destruction of mystical Babylon, the head of the opposition against the kingdom of the Lord Christ. But Babylon sinks like a mill-stone in the mighty ocean, and is no more found. So must all his enemies perish. The catastrophe of Babylon, like that of Pharaoh at the Red Sea, is beheld by the saints and servants of the Lord with admiration, and furnishes them with a theme for a song of triumph to his praise. This may be properly styled sacred music indeed. It is commanded, inspired, and regulated by the Lord himself. The performers are all interested in the subject, "they who "fear God," and are devoted to his service and glory. And though persons of this character are comparatively few upon earth, hidden, and in a manner lost, among the crowd of mankind; they will be, when brought together at last, a very large company. Their united voices are here compared to the voice of many waters, and of mighty thunders, and this is the solemn close, the chorus of their song, "Hallelujah, for the Lord "God omnipotent reigneth."

The impression which the performance of this passage in the Oratorio usually makes upon the audience is well known. But however great the power of music may be, should we even allow the flights of poetry to be truth, that it can "soften rocks, and bend the "knotted oak," one thing we are sure it cannot do; it cannot soften and change the hard heart, it cannot bend the obdurate will of man. If all the people who successively hear the *Messiah*, who are struck and astonished, for the moment, by this chorus in particular, were to bring away with them an abiding sense of the

importance of the sentiment it contains, the nation would soon wear a new face. But do the professed lovers of sacred music, in this enlightened age, generally live as if they really believed that "the Lord God omnipotent "reigneth?" Rather, do not the greater part of them live, as they might do if they were sure of the contrary? as if they were satisfied to a demonstration, that either there is no God, or that his providence is not concerned in human affairs? I appeal to conscience; I appeal to fact.

I apprehend that this passage, taken in the strictest sense, refers to a period not yet arrived. Babylon is not yet fallen. The servants of God in the present day, will most probably fulfil their appointed time upon earth, like those who have lived before them, in a state of conflict. They must endure the cross, and sustain opposition for his sake. The people who shall live when "the kingdoms of the world become the kingdoms "of our Lord, and of his Christ," when the "nations "shall learn war no more," are yet unborn. But even now we may rejoice that "the Lord God omnipotent "reigneth," and that Jesus is "King of kings, and "Lord of lords." I must consider my text as referring to him. Many of the Heathens believed that God reigned. The Christian doctrine is, that the Lord God omnipotent exerciseth his dominion and government in the person of Christ. "The Father loveth "the Son, and hath committed all things into his "hands*." And thus our Lord, after his resurrection, assured his disciples, "All power is committed unto "me in heaven and in earth†." He has already "taken to himself his great power, and reigneth."

* John iii. 35. † Matth. xxviii. 18.

His right of reigning over all is essential to his divine nature; but the administration of government in the nature of man, is the effect and reward of his obedience unto death. But in the union of both natures, he is one person, Christ Jesus the Lord. All the riches and fulness of the Godhead, all the peculiar honours of the Mediator, centre in him. They may be distinguished, but they are inseparable.

Happy are they who can, upon solid and Scriptural grounds, exult in the thought that the Lord reigneth, and can make his government the subject of their hallelujahs and praises! Happy they, who see, acknowledge, and admire his management in the kingdom of providence, and are the willing subjects of his kingdom of grace. Let us take a brief survey of his reigning glory in these kingdoms.

I. Great and marvellous is this Lord God omnipotent in his kingdom of Universal Providence. His mighty arm sustains the vast fabric of the universe. He upholds the stars in their courses. If we attentively consider their multitude, their magnitudes, their distances from us and from each other, and the amazing swiftness, variety, and regularity of their motions, our minds are overwhelmed, our thoughts confounded, by the vastness and the wonders of the scene. But He spoke them into being, and they are preserved in their stations and revolutions by his power and agency. If we fix our thoughts upon the earth, though in comparison of the immensity of his creation, it is but as a point or a grain of sand, it is the object of his incessant care. All its various inhabitants derive their existence and their support from him. He provides for the young ravens when unable to fly, and for the young lions that traverse the woods. The instinct of animals, whereby

they are unerringly instructed in whatever concerns the welfare and preservation of their species, so vastly exceeding the boasted wisdom of man, that he can neither imitate nor comprehend it, is communicated by him. He teaches the birds to build their nests, the spider to weave his web, and instructs the communities of bees, and insignificant emmets, to form their admirable policies and government among themselves. If we speak of intelligent beings, "He does what he pleases "in the armies of heaven, and among the inhabitants "of the earth." He directs and over-rules the counsels and purposes of men, so that, though they act freely, the event of all their different interfering schemes is only the accomplishment of his purposes. When they are employed as his instruments, from small beginnings, and in defiance of difficulties apparently insuperable, they succeed beyond their own expectations. When unhappily engaged against his designs, in vain they rage and plot. He takes the wise in their own craftiness, pours contempt upon their power and policy, and all their great preparations melt like a mist, or like snow before the sun, and leave no trace behind. Still more wonderful, to the eye of faith, is his control over Satan and the powers of darkness. Whatever, for wise reasons, though unknown to us, he may permit them to do, they cannot with all their subtilty or strength, detain one soul in their bondage longer than till his appointed time of release; nor recover one soul back to their dominion, of which he is pleased to undertake the care. On the contrary, he breaks the heads of these Leviathans in pieces, turns their counsels against themselves, and makes them instrumental in purifying his people, and extending his church, by the means they employ for the destruction of both. Thus they who dwell under his

shadow are safe; for all things are in his power, and he always careth for them, and keepeth them, as the pupil of his eye; and therefore, though they are exercised with trials, and suffer many things for their good, his eye being always upon them, and his ear open to their prayer, they are supported, supplied, relieved, delivered, and, at last, made more than conquerors.

II. He has a peculiar kingdom, which he has established distinct from the kingdoms of this world, though diffused and extended among them, and which, in due time, like leaven, will pervade and assimilate them all to himself. This is the kingdom of the Gospel, his church. It is founded upon a rock, and though the gates of hell continually war against it, they cannot prevail. For he is "a wall of fire round about it, and "a glory in the midst of it*."

Here he reigns upon a throne of grace. He possesses and exercises unlimited authority as a sovereign, to save whom he pleases, to pardon all manner of sins and offences, and to admit rebels and enemies, when they submit themselves and bow to his golden sceptre, into the number of his children and his friends. Seldom do the kings of the earth publish an act of grace in the favour of those who have been guilty of rebellion, without clogging it with exceptions. Either they feel a resentment against some of the delinquents, which they have not magnanimity sufficient to conquer, or they dare not trust them. But his mercy is infinite; and he knows how to change their hearts when he pardons their sins.

Perhaps it may not be a digression wholly unuseful

* Zech. ii. 5.

and impertinent, if I take this occasion to point out the several senses in which the word *church* may be understood agreeably to the Scripture.

1. It denotes, in the aggregate, the mystical church, the whole body of that spiritual kingdom, of which the Redeemer is the living and life-giving head*. A succession of these has appeared upon earth in every age, from the days of righteous Abel, whom Cain slew; and we have reason to believe, that the far greater part of them are yet unborn. They will all be assembled together before the throne, in the great day of his final appearance, and inherit the kingdom of glory prepared for them. This is the "church which God hath bought "with his own blood†." Happy are they who belong to this society of the redeemed, "whose names are "written in heaven."

2. The visible church contains all those who bear and acknowledge the name of Christians, and who admit and enjoy the Gospel revelation. The church, in this sense includes many nations. But it is a small thing to belong only to the visible church, for it is compared to a corn-floor‡ on which chaff is mingled with the wheat; to a field in which tares grow promiscuously with the good seed; to a fisher's net enclosing a great multitude of fishes, both good and bad§. But a time of discrimination will come. The chaff and the tares, and whatever is evil, will be consumed. Alas! what will it avail at last to say, "Lord, we have eaten and "drank in thy presence," at thy table with thy true disciples, "and thou hast taught in our streets‖," and we have heard in our own language of thy wonderful

* Col. i. 18. † Acts xx. 28. ‡ Matth. iii. 12.
§ Matth. xiii. 24. 47. ‖ Luke xiii. 26, 27.

works, if you can say no more? My heart is pained with the apprehension, lest some of you who have joined in the same public worship with true believers, have sat in the same seat, and lived in the same families, should at last see them, with whom you have been very nearly connected in this world, received into the kingdom of heaven, and you yourselves be shut out.

3. The catholic church, in any one period, is that part of the visible church which is united to the Lord by living faith. It comprises all who agree in the profession of the fundamental truths of the Gospel, and whose conversation is regulated by its precepts, or, in the apostle's words, "All who love the Lord Jesus "Christ in sincerity*:" This catholic church, through the policy of Satan and the deceitfulness of the heart, is too much divided against itself. Prejudice, bigotry, and remaining ignorance, greatly prevent that desirable union amongst true Christians, which would promote their peace, comfort, and increase, and would contribute more than a thousand arguments to put their adversaries to shame and to silence. That shameful contention for denominations, parties, and favourite preachers, for which the apostle reproved the Corinthians†, is still greatly to be lamented. But, though they are too backward in acknowledging and assisting each other, the Lord is merciful to their weakness, and bears with them all. And as they grow in grace, and drink more into his Spirit, their hearts are enlarged, and they approach nearer to his pattern of long-suffering, patience, and tenderness.

4. The word church is applied to particular societies of Christians, who are connected by a participation in

* Eph. vi. 24. † 1 Cor. iii. 4.

the same ordinances of the Gospel, and who maintain a Scriptural separation from the sinful spirit and customs of the world. And though there may be pretenders among them, as there were among the apostolic churches, they are denominated by the better part. They belong to the catholic church by their profession of the truth, of course they are a part of the visible church; and those of them who are, in deed and in truth, what they profess to be, are living members of the mystical church, to which all the promises are made. By whatever name they are known or distinguished among men, they are "branches of the true vine," they "have their fruit "unto holiness, and their end everlasting life." But to return:—

In this his church, or spiritual kingdom, he rules by wise and gracious laws and ordinances. He releases his subjects from all authority, in point of conscience, but his own, and enjoins them to call no one master but himself*. If they "stand fast in the liberty "wherewith he has made them free†," they will not give themselves up implicitly to the dictates of any man, nor follow him further than he follows their Lord. And consequently, if they are influenced by his royal law of doing to others as they would that others should do unto them, they will not attempt to exert an undue authority, or wish to be called masters themselves, so as to assume a dogmatical carriage, or to expect a universal and absolute submission. But it must be owned that, in our present state of infirmity, this privilege is not sufficiently prized, nor this command duly complied with, there being scarcely a man who does not either arrogate too much to himself, or allow too much to

* Matth. xxiii. 8—10. † Gal. v. 1.

others. A fault in the one or the other of these respects, may be assigned as a principal cause of most of the evils which deform the appearance, or injure the peace of the church. But the design of his Gospel is to set his people at liberty from the yoke of men, from the fetters of custom and tradition, of superstition and will-worship, that they may enjoy, in his service, a state of perfect freedom.

For it is the principal glory of his kingdom, that he reigns in the hearts of his people. There he writes his precepts, impresses his image, and erects his throne; ruling them, not merely by an outward law, but by an inward secret influence, breathing his own life and spirit into them: so that their obedience becomes, as it were, natural, pleasurable, and its own reward. By the discoveries he affords them of his love, he wins their affections, captivates their wills, and enlightens their understandings. They derive from him the "spirit of "power, of love, and of a sound mind*," and run with alacrity in the way of his commandments.

It is impossible, therefore, to make this song our own, and cordially to rejoice that "the Lord God omnipo- "tent reigneth," unless we are the willing subjects of his government; unless we are really pleased with his appointed way of salvation, approve of his precepts, and, from a view of his wisdom and goodness, can cheerfully submit and resign ourselves to the disposal of his providence. In all these respects we are by nature at variance with him. We are too proud to be indebted to his grace, too wise in our own conceits to desire his instruction, too obstinately attached to the love and practice of sin, to be capable of relishing the

* 2 Tim. i. 7.

beauty and spirituality of his commandments. And our love of the world, and the things of it, is too strong and grasping, to permit us to be satisfied with the lot, and with the dispensations he appoints for us. We wish, if possible, and as far as possible we attempt, to be our own carvers. We are unthankful when he bestows, impatient if he withholds, and if he sees fit to resume the gifts of which we are unworthy, we repine and rebel against his will. This enmity must be subdued, before we can be pleased with his government: in other words, we must be changed, we must be made new creatures. To produce this change, this new creation, the Gospel is the only expedient; and when revealed and applied to the heart by the power of the Holy Spirit, the miracle is wrought. The sinner who is first convinced of his guilt and misery, and then reconciled to God by faith in the great atonement, willingly yields to his administration. He owns and feels the propriety of his proceedings, is ready to acknowledge, in his sharpest afflictions, that the Lord is gracious, and has not dealt with him according to the desert of his iniquities. He considers himself as no longer his own, but bought with a price, and brought under the strongest obligations, "to live no longer to himself, "but to him who loved him and gave himself for him." And what was before his dread and dislike, becomes now the joy of his heart, the thought that the Lord reigneth, and that all his concerns are in the hands of him who doeth all things well.

Are there any among us who say in their hearts, "We will not have this" Saviour "to rule over us?" The thought is no less vain than wicked. He must, he will "reign, till he has subdued all enemies under his "feet." You must either bend or break before him.

SERMON XXXVII.

THE EXTENT OF MESSIAH'S SPIRITUAL KINGDOM.

REVELATION xi. 15.

The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.

THE kingdom of our Lord in the heart, and in the world, is frequently compared to a building or house, of which he himself is both the foundation and the architect*. A building advances by degrees†, and while it is in an unfinished state, a stranger cannot, by viewing its present appearance, form an accurate judgment of the design, and what the whole will be when completed. For a time, the walls are of unequal height, it is disfigured by rubbish, which at the proper season will be taken away; and by scaffolding, which, though useful for carrying on the building, does not properly belong to it, but will likewise be removed when the present temporary service is answered. But the architect himself proceeds according to a determinate plan, and his idea of the whole work is perfect from the beginning. It is thus the Lord views his people in the present life. He has begun a good work in them, but as yet every part of it is imperfect and unfinished; and there are not only defects to be supplied, but deformities and encumbrances that must be removed. Many of the dispensations and exercises which contribute to

* Isa. xxviii. 16.; liv. 11, 12. † 1 Cor. iii. 9.; Eph. ii. 20—22.

form their religious character, do not properly belong to that work which is to abide, though they have a subserviency to promote it. When that which is perfect is come, the rest shall be done away.

And thus, although the growth and extent of his kingdom is the great scope and object of his providence, to which all the revolutions that take place in the kingdoms of this world shall be finally subservient; yet the steps by which he is carrying forward his design, are for the most part, remote from the common apprehensions of mankind, and therefore seldom engage their attention. His kingdom, founded upon the rock of ages, is building, advancing, and the gates of hell shall not be able to withstand its progress. Only detached and inconsiderable parts of the plan are as yet visible, and the beauties are every where obscured by attendant blemishes; but his counsel shall stand, and he will do all his pleasure. Princes and statesmen seldom think of him, are seldom aware that in prosecuting their own schemes, they are eventually fulfilling his purposes, and preparing the way to promote the cause which they despise, and often endeavour to suppress. But thus it is. Sometimes he employs them, more directly, as his instruments; and when they are thus engaged in his work, their success is secured. So Cyrus, whom Isaiah mentioned by name*, long before his birth, as the appointed deliverer of Israel from their captivity, prospered in his enterprises, being guided and girded by him whom he knew not, and established his own power upon the ruins of the Assyrian monarchy. The Roman empire likewise increased and prospered from small beginnings, that a way might be

* Isa. xlv. 1—5.

opened, in the proper season, for the destruction of the Jewish economy, and for facilitating the preaching of the Gospel. And posterity will see; that the principal events of the present age in Asia and America, have all a tendency to bring forward the accomplishment of my text; and are leading to one grand point, the spreading and establishment of the church and kingdom of our Lord. His plan is unalterably fixed. He has said it, and it shall be done. Things will not always remain in their present disordered state; and though this desirable period may be yet at a distance, and appearances very dark and unpromising, the word of the Lord shall prevail over all discouragements and opposition.

Prophecies which are not yet fulfilled will necessarily be obscure. Many learned men have laboured to explain the prophecies in this book, to ascertain the facts which are foretold, and to fix the dates when they may be expected to take place. But they are so divided in their judgments, and with regard to several of the most eminent who thus differ, the support their opinions derive from the character and abilities of the proposers is so nearly equal, that those who consult them are more likely to be embarrassed than satisfied. For myself, I think it becomes me to confess my ignorance, and my inability, either to reconcile the conjectures of others, or to determine which is the more probable, or to propose better of my own. I do not, therefore, undertake to give the precise sense of this passage, as it stands connected with the rest of the chapter. Nor should I, perhaps, have attempted to preach from it, but upon this occasion. It is introduced, with great propriety, in the *Messiah*, as a close to the second part, which begins with a view of the Lamb of God taking away

the sins of the world, by the power of his priestly office; and concludes with an account of his glorious success, as the King of kings, and Lord of lords.

My business is only to lead you to some pleasing and profitable reflections upon this subject, now it comes in my way. There are many prophecies in the Old Testament, that speak in magnificent strains of a kingdom, which God would, in his appointed time, establish upon the earth; the sense of which is greatly weakened and narrowed, if restrained, as some commentators would restrain it, to the restoration of Israel to their own land, from their captivity in Babylon. Yet it must be allowed, that the highly figurative language in which many of these prophecies are expressed, a great part of which cannot be understood literally, renders the interpretation difficult.

What we read in the twentieth chapter of this book, of a period in which the saints shall reign with Christ during a thousand years, has given occasion to almost a thousand conjectures, concerning a millennian state. Some persons suppose, that the present frame of nature shall be dissolved and changed, and expect a proper resurrection of the dead; after which, the Lord will personally reign with his people upon the earth, when purified by fire, and restored to its primitive perfection and beauty. If so, earth will be heaven; for the state of happiness believers are taught to hope for, depends not upon local circumstances, but chiefly consists in the enjoyment of his unveiled immediate presence, and in beholding his glory. Others seem to conceive of the millennium, nearly in the same manner as the Jews formed their expectations of MESSIAH's kingdom. They think that temporal honours, dominion, prosperity, and wealth, will then be the portion of

believers; the very portion which they are now called upon to renounce and despise. But, as I have hinted, large allowances must be made for the metaphorical language of prophecy. We read, that the streets of the New Jerusalem are paved with gold, and that the twelve gates are twelve pearls*; but no person of sound judgment can suppose, that this description is to be understood strictly, according to the letter. The personal presence of MESSIAH with his people, is not necessary to such degrees of happiness, as are compatible with the present state of mortality and imperfection. It is sufficient, if he vouchsafes to dwell with them by his Spirit. Much less are temporal dominion and wealth necessary to the prosperity and honour of his spiritual kingdom. But what then are we encouraged to expect, beyond what has been hitherto known, with regard to this point? Let us consult the Scriptures, which alone can guide and determine our inquiry. I will select some express passages, a few out of many which might be adduced, but sufficient, I hope, by the rules of sober interpretation, to lead us to a satisfactory answer.

The glory and happiness of MESSIAH's kingdom, is described by the prophets in terms which cannot be justly applied to any period of the church already past. They sometimes represent it by a variety of beautiful pastoral images, and sometimes in plainer language. Thus Isaiah, "And it shall come to pass in the last "days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be "established on the top of the mountains, and shall "be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall "flow unto it. And many people shall go and say,

* Rev. xxi. 15. 21.

" Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the " Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, and he will " teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths; " for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word " of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge " among the nations, and shall rebuke many people; " and they shall beat their swords into plough-shares, " and their spears into pruning-hooks: Nation shall " not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they " learn war any more*." Again, " The wolf also shall " dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down " with the kid; and the calf, and the young lion, and " the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. " And the cow and the bear shall feed, their young " ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat " straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play " on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall " put his hand on the cockatrice' den. They shall not " hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain; for the " earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as " the waters cover the sea†." I might likewise transcribe the whole of the sixtieth chapter, but shall only offer you the latter part of it: " Violence shall no " more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction " within thy borders; but thou shalt call thy walls Sal- " vation, and thy gates Praise. The sun shall be no " more thy light by day, neither for brightness shall the " moon give light unto thee: but the Lord shall be " unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory. " Thy sun shall no more go down, neither shall thy " moon withdraw itself: for the Lord shall be thine " everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall

* Isa. ii. 2—4. † Isa. xi. 6—9.

" be ended. Thy people also shall be all righteous, " they shall inherit the land for ever, the branch of my " planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glo- " rified. A little one shall become a thousand, and a " small one a strong nation: I the Lord will hasten it " in his time*." To the same purpose the prophet Ezekiel: " And I will set up one shepherd over " them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David, " and he shall be their shepherd. And I the Lord will " be their God, and my servant David a prince among " them; I the Lord have spoken it. And I will make " with them a covenant of peace, and will cause the " evil beasts to cease out of the land; and they shall " dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods. " And I will make them, and the places round about " my hill, a blessing; and I will cause the shower to " come down in his season, there shall be showers of " blessing†." And again: " Then will I sprinkle clean " water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all " your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse " you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new " spirit will I put within you, and I will take away the " stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a " heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, " and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them‡." " And the desolate land shall be tilled, whereas it lay " desolate in the sight of all that passed by. And they " shall say, This land that was desolate is become like " the garden of Eden; and the waste and desolate, " and ruined cities, are become fenced and inhabited§." The prophet Zechariah speaks to the same effect:

* Isa. lx. 18—22.
† Ezek. xxxvi. 25—27.
‡ Ezek. xxxiv. 23—26.
§ Ezek. xxxvi. 34, 35.

"Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion; for, lo, I come, "and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the Lord. "And many nations shall be joined to the Lord in that "day, and shall be my people; and I will dwell in the "midst of thee; and thou shalt know that the Lord "of hosts hath sent me unto thee." "And the Lord "shall be king over all the earth; in that day there "shall be one Lord, and his name One*."

Though the promises and prophecies of this import are addressed to the church, under the names of Israel, Jacob, Zion, or Jerusalem, we are certain they were not fulfilled to the nation of Israel while their civil government subsisted. Their national prosperity and glory were greatly diminished before any of these prophecies were revealed. They were an inconstant and a suffering people, during the reigns of the kings of Judah and Israel, till at length their city and temple were destroyed by the Chaldeans. And, though they returned from their captivity, and their city and temple were rebuilt, they continued tributary and dependent, and were successively subject to the Persian, Macedonian, and Roman power. Their obstinate rejection and crucifixion of MESSIAH, filled up the measure of their iniquities, and brought wrath upon them to the uttermost. They were soon afterwards exterminated from their land; their constitution, both of church and state, utterly subverted; and they remain, to this day, in a dispersed state, which renders the observance of their law impracticable.

It seems equally plain, that these prophecies have not yet been fulfilled to the Christian church. The greater part of the earth, to this day, is unacquainted

* Zech. ii. 10, 11.; xiv. 9.

with the name of Jesus. And the general face of Christendom, whether in Popish or in Protestant countries, exhibits little more of the spirit and character of the Gospel, than is to be found among the Heathens. If Christianity be compatible with pride or baseness, with avarice or profusion, with malice and envy, with scepticism in principle, and licentiousness of conduct, then Christians abound: but if humility, integrity, benevolence, and a spiritual mind, are essential to a Christian; if we judge by the criterion which our Lord himself appointed, and account only those his disciples who live in the exercise of mutual love, it is to be feared that they are but few, even in the places which are most favoured with the light of the Gospel. But can the Scriptures be broken? Can the promises of the Lord fail? By no means. "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but "not one jot or tittle" of his word shall fail of accomplishment.

It is not necessary to suppose that every individual of mankind shall be savingly converted to the Lord in this future day of his power; but I apprehend the current language of the prophecies warrant us to hope, that the prayers and desires of the church shall, in some future period, be signally answered, in the following respects:

1. That the Gospel shall visit the nations which are at present involved in darkness. The Heathen are given to MESSIAH for "his inheritance, and the utter-"most parts of the earth for his possession." At present, (as I have formerly observed*,) if the whole of Christendom was inhabited by real Christians, they would bear but a small proportion to the rest of man-

* Page 360.

kind. Large countries in Europe, Asia, and Africa, where the Gospel was once known, have been for many ages involved in Mohammedan darkness. The scattered remnants of the Greek church in Turkey are so miserably depraved and ignorant, that they scarcely deserve to be mentioned as an exception. The rest of Asia knows little of Christianity, unless they have learnt it in the eastern parts from the cruelty and tyranny of men who bear the name of Christians. The like may be said of America, excepting the northern provinces of our late dominion there. For the zeal of the Spaniards and Portuguese has produced few other effects than rapine, slavery, and deluges of human blood. The interior parts, both of Africa and America, are unknown. The countries and islands lately discovered in the southern hemisphere, are left, as they were found, in gross ignorance. The exertions of our navigators to supply them with sheep and cows, and useful implements, from Europe, were humane and laudable. But it does not appear that the least attempt was made to impart to them the knowledge of our holy religion. The only missionary they have from us, (if he be yet living,) is the much spoken of Omiah. This man was brought to England, almost from the antipodes; he spent some time amongst us, and was then sent back to tell his countrymen what he had seen and heard. But if he gave a faithful account of our customs, morals, and religion, so far as they fell within the circle of his own observations, the relation would certainly be little to our honour, and I am afraid much to their hurt. In brief, a large part of Europe, almost the whole of the other three continents, with the islands in the Eastern and Southern Oceans, are destitute of the true Gospel. But there is a time approaching, called "the fulness of

" the Gentiles," when the Redeemer's glory shall dawn and shine upon all nations. And though we cannot see when or how this happy change shall be effected, yet, in the Lord's hour, mountains shall sink into plains. Nor is it more improbable to us now, than it would have seemed to an inhabitant of Rome in the time of Julius Cæsar, that the island of Great Britain should one day be distinguished by all those privileges which the providence of God has since bestowed upon it.

2. That this Gospel, shall prevail, not in word only, but in power. Even where the name of Christ is professed, but little of the power of it is at present known. The superstition and false worship generally prevalent within the pale of the Roman and Greek churches, may be mentioned without offence to Protestants. But the bulk of the Protestant countries are equally overspread with scepticism and wickedness. Few, comparatively, among Protestants, are friendly to that Gospel which the apostles preached; and much fewer are they who are influenced by it. Perhaps no nation is favoured with greater advantages for knowing the truth than our nation, nor any city more favoured than this city. I doubt not but there are persons now living, who would have been thought eminent Christians, if they had lived in the first and happiest age of the church; and I trust their number is greater than we are aware of. The Lord has a hidden people, little known to the world, or to each other. But if we judge by the standard of truth, we must acknowledge that the power of religious profession is very low. How little does it appear in the lives, tempers, and pursuits of the most who hear the Gospel? But the time will c[illegible] Christians shall again be known by th[illegible]

spiritual-mindedness, and benevolence, and by all the fruits of righteousness, which are, by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. The fall of mystical Babylon, and of antichrist in its various forms, and the calling of the Jews, are events which are positively foretold, and which, when they come to pass, will have great effects. Zion, as yet, is only building, but it shall be built.

3. That the animosities and disputes which prevail among Christians shall cease. The observation of a late ingenious writer, which, it is to be feared, he was confirmed in by his own experience, is too much founded in truth :—"We have just religion enough to make us "hate one another." The spirit of party, prejudice, bigotry, and interest; a zeal for systems, forms, modes, and denominations, furnish men with plausible pretences for indulging their unsanctified passions, and deceive them into an opinion, that while they are gratifying their pride and self-will, they are only labouring to promote the cause of God and truth. Hence often the feuds which obtain among religious people are pursued with greater violence and to greater lengths, and are productive of more mischievous consequences, than the quarrels of drunkards. The lovers of peace, who refuse to take a part in these contentions, but rather weep over them in secret, are censured and despised as neutrals and cowards, by the angry combatants on all sides, while the world despises and laughs at them all. It was not so in the beginning, nor will it be so always. The hour is coming, when believers shall be united in love, shall agree in all that is essential to a life of faith and holiness, and shall live in the exercise of forbearance and tenderness towards each other, if, in some points *of smaller* importance, they cannot think exactly alike;

which possibly may be the case in the best times, in the present imperfect state of human nature. "Ephraim "then shall no more envy Judah, nor Judah vex "Ephraim*."

4. That it will be a time of general peace. At present, the kingdoms which, by their profession, should be subjects of the Prince of Peace, are perpetually disturbing, invading, and destroying each other. They live in habits of mutual fear and jealousy, and maintain great armies on all sides; that each nation may be prepared, if occasion offers, to strike the first blow. War is followed as a trade, and cultivated as a science; and they who, with the greatest diligence and success, spread devastation and ruin far and wide, and deluge the earth with human blood, acquire the title of heroes and conquerors. Can there be a stronger confirmation of what we read in Scripture concerning the depravity of man? Can we conceive an employment more suited to gratify the malignity of Satan and the powers of darkness, if they were permitted to appear and act amongst us in human shapes? Could such enormities possibly obtain, if the mild and merciful spirit of the Gospel generally prevailed? But it shall prevail at last, and then "the nations shall learn war no more†."

How transporting the thought! that a time shall yet arrive, when the love of God and man, of truth and righteousness, shall obtain through the earth. The evils, (and these are the greatest evils of human life,) which men bring upon themselves, and upon each other, by their wickedness, shall cease; and we may believe that the evils in the natural world will be greatly abated. Sin will no longer call down the tokens

* Isa. xi. 13. † Isa. ii. 4.

of God's displeasure, by such public calamities as hurricanes, earthquakes, pestilence, and famine. And if some natural evils, as pain and sickness, should remain, submission to the will of God, and the compassion and tenderness of men towards the afflicted, will render them tolerable.

If this prospect be desirable to us, surely it will be the object of our prayers. The Lord will do great things, but he will be inquired of by his people for the performance.

But to many persons the extension of dominion and commerce appears much more desirable. The glory and extent of the British government has been eagerly pursued; and the late diminution of our national grandeur and influence has been much laid to heart; while the glory of the Redeemer's kingdom, and the conversion of the Heathens, are considered by the politicians and merchants of the earth, as trivial concerns, unworthy of their notice, or rather as obstacles to the views of ambition and avarice. But it is said of MESSIAH, and of his church, "The nation and kingdom that will "not serve thee shall perish *." The word of God may be slighted, but it cannot be annulled; and it is more a subject for lamentation than wonder, that our national prosperity should decline, when we are indifferent, yea, adverse, to that cause which the great Governor of the world has engaged to promote and establish.

* Isa. lx. 12.

SERMON XXXVIII.

KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.

REVELATION XIX. 16.

[*And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written,*]
KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.

THE description of the administration and glory of the Redeemer's kingdom, in defiance of all opposition, concludes the second part of the *Messiah*. Three different passages from this book are selected to form a grand chorus, of which his title in this verse is the close; a title which has been sometimes vainly usurped by proud worms of the earth. Eastern monarchs, in particular, have affected to style themselves king of kings, and lord of lords. In the Scriptural language, men, whether high or low, rich or poor, one with another, are compared to worms and potsherds of the earth; but they are by nature so strongly infected by pride, that they cannot invent titles of honour answerable to the idea they have of their own importance, without intrenching upon the divine prerogative. Thus sovereignty, majesty, holiness, and grace, and other attributes which properly belong to God alone, are parcelled out among the *great*. But let the great and the mighty know, that wherein they speak proudly, MESSIAH is above them. The whole verse, (of which the latter clause only is in the Oratorio,) offers two points to our meditations.

I. How he is represented as wearing his title. It is written, or inscribed, upon his vesture dipped in blood,

and upon his thigh; either upon that part of his vesture which covers his thigh, or upon the upper part of his vesture, and upon his thigh likewise.

II. The title itself, "King of kings, and Lord of "lords." Whatever power the kings and lords among mankind possess, is derived from him, and absolutely subject to his control.

I. The manner in which he wears his name or title. It is written upon his vesture and upon his thigh.

1. This name being written upon his "vesture," denotes the manifestation and the ground of his authority. It is written upon his outward garment, to be read, known, and acknowledged by all beholders. And it is upon his bloody garment, upon the vesture stained with his own blood, and the blood of his enemies; which intimates to us, that his government is founded upon the success of his great undertaking. In the passage from whence this verse is selected, there are three names attributed to MESSIAH. He has "a name which no "one knows but himself*," agreeably to what he declared when upon earth. No man, οὐδεὶς, no one, neither man nor angel, knoweth the Son, but the Father; this refers to his eternal power and Godhead. A second name, "The Word of God†," denotes the mystery of the divine personality. The name in my text imports his glory, as the Mediator between God and man, in our nature, which, when he resumed it from the grave, became the seat of all power and authority; which power we are now taught to consider, not merely as the power of God, to whom it essentially belongs, but as the power of God exercised in and by that Man who died upon the cross for our sins. In consequence

* Rev. xix. 12. † Rev. xix. 13.

of his obedience unto death, he received "a name which "is above every name*." This inscription his own people read by the eye of faith in the present life, and it inspires them with confidence and joy, under the many tribulations they pass through in the course of their profession. Hereafter it shall be openly known, and read by all men. Every eye shall see it, and every heart must either bow or break before him.

2. It is written upon his "thigh." The thigh is the emblem of power, and is the part of the body on which the sword is girded†. By this emblem we are taught, that he will assuredly maintain and exercise the right which he has acquired. As he has a just claim to the title, he will act accordingly. Many titles among men are merely titular. So the king of Great Britain is styled likewise king of France, though he has neither authority nor possessions in that kingdom. But this name which MESSIAH bears is full of life, truth, and influence. He is styled "King of kings, and Lord of "lords," because he really is so; because he actually rules and reigns over them, and does according to his own pleasure "in the armies of heaven, and among "the inhabitants of the earth," with an absolute and uncontrollable sway, "so that none can stay his hand, "or say unto him, what doest thou‡?"

II. The title itself is "King of kings, and Lord of "lords." He is the "Prince of the kings of the earth§." Too many of them imagine a vain thing. They take counsel together, and set themselves against him, saying, "Let us break his bands asunder‖." But "he "sitteth in the heavens, and has them in derision."

* Phil. ii. 9. † Psal. xlv. 3. ‡ Dan. iv. 35.
§ Rev. i. 5. ‖ Psal. ii. 3.

He has his hook in their nose, and his bridle in their lips; and the result of all their contrivances is neither more nor less than the accomplishment of his will.

1. The rage they discover, and the resistance they make, cannot weaken this truth, but rather render it more evident. If it be asked, Why does he permit them to resist? we may give an answer in point from the case of Pharaoh. He resisted, and he perished. He was often warned and rebuked, but he still hardened his neck, and continued stubborn under repeated judgments, till at length he was destroyed without remedy. Thus the God of Israel was more magnified, and the people of Israel were more honoured, in the view of the surrounding nations, when they were brought from Egypt with a high hand and with a stretched-out arm, and when Pharaoh and his armies were overthrown in the Red Sea, than the nature of the case would have admitted, if Pharaoh had made no opposition to their departure. Yet the obstinacy of Pharaoh was properly his own. It is true, we are assured that God hardened his heart; but we are not thereby warranted to suppose that God is the author of the sin which he hates and forbids. It is written again, that "God "cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any "man*," and the Scripture is to be interpreted consistently with itself. It would be absurd to ascribe darkness or ice to the agency of the sun, though both inevitably follow, if the light and heat of the sun be withdrawn to a certain degree. A degree of heat is necessary to keep water in that state of fluidity which we commonly suppose essential to its nature; but it is rather essential to the nature of water to harden into

* James i. 13.

ice, if it be deprived of the heat which is necessary to preserve it in a fluid state; and the hardest metals will melt and flow like water, if heat be proportionably increased. Thus it is with the heart of fallen man. In whatever degree it is soft and impressive, capable of feeling and tenderness, we must attribute it to the secret influence of the Father and Fountain of Light; and if he is pleased to withdraw his influence, nothing more is needful to its complete induration.

2. The kings of the earth are continually disturbing the world with their schemes of ambition. They expect to carry every thing before them, and have seldom any higher end in view, than the gratification of their own passions. But in all they do they are but servants of this great King and Lord, and fulfil his purposes, as the instruments he employs to inflict prescribed punishment upon transgressors against him, or to open a way for the spread of his Gospel. Thus, under the Old Testament dispensation, (for he was King from everlasting,) the successes of Sennacherib and Nebuchadnezzar, and the exaltation of Cyrus, were entirely owing to their being employed by him, as an axe or a saw in the hand of the workman*. And they acted under a limited commission, beyond which they could not go. They had one thing in view, He had another; and when his design was accomplished, we hear of them no more. Time would not suffice, were I to adduce the many striking instances of the like kind which offer to observation from the perusal of modern history. It is well known, with respect to that great event, the Reformation from Popery in the sixteenth century, and especially in our own land, that many of the principal

* Isa. x. 15.

persons who contributed to its establishment hated it in their hearts. But their ambition, appetites, and worldly policy, engaged them in such measures, as the King of kings over-ruled to produce consequences which they neither intended nor could foresee; and which, when they did apprehend, they would have prevented if they could, but it was too late. Future writers, I doubt not, will make the like reflection on the late American war: in the origin and progress of which, there was such an evident disproportion between the apparent causes, and the effects produced by them; between the first designs and expectations of the principal actors on both sides, and the final event; that I think they who do not perceive a superintending Providence conducting the whole affair, as a preparation to still greater and more important revolutions, must be quite at a loss to account for what has already happened, upon any principles of human policy or foresight.

3. That he is King of kings, and Governor among the nations, is further evident from the preservation of his people; for the world is against them, and they have no protector but him. The wrath of man, like the waves of the sea, has bounds prescribed to it which it cannot pass. So far as he is pleased to over-rule it to his own praise, he will permit it to operate; but the remainder, that is not subservient to the accomplishment of his purpose, he will restrain*. But he works so secretly, though powerfully, by the agency of second causes, that only they who are enlightened by his word and Spirit can perceive his interference. He permitted Ahithophel to give that counsel to Absalom which,

* Psal. lxxvi. 10.

though wicked, was, in the political sense of the word, prudent; that is, it was the probable method of putting David into the power of his rebellious son. David had prayed that the Lord would "turn Ahithophel's counsel "into foolishness*." Had the Lord instantly deprived Ahithophel of his reason, this prayer would have been more visibly, but not more effectually answered, than by the counter-advice of Hushai, which, though rash and extravagant, being suited to gratify the vanity and folly of Absalom, rendered the other abortive†. Sometimes the enemies of his church divide and wrangle among themselves, and then one party, to mortify and oppose the other, will protect those whom otherwise they wish to destroy. Thus Paul escaped from the malice of the Jewish council, by the sudden disagreement which arose between the Pharisees and Sadducees‡, though they came together equally determined to destroy him. At other times, kings and statesmen act so inconsistently with their professed aims, and take steps so directly calculated to prevent what they wish to obtain, or to bring upon themselves what they mean to avoid, that we can only say, they are infatuated. A very small compliance seemed likely to have secured the affection of the twelve tribes to Rehoboam. We are ready to wonder that he could not be prevailed on to speak mildly to the people for one day, with a view of engaging them to be his servants for ever. But when we read that the cause was from the Lord§, and that, in this way, his purpose of separating the kingdoms of Israel and Judah was effected, the wonder ceases. Very observable, likewise, was the coincidence of cir-

* 2 Sam. xv. 31. † 2 Sam. xvii. 14.
‡ Acts xxiii. 7. § 1 Kings xii. 15.

cumstances which preserved the Jews in Persia from the destructive designs of their adversary Haman. If the king* had slept that night, as usual, or if his attendant had read to him in any book but the Chronicle of the empire, or in any part of that chronicle but the very passage in which the service of Mordecai had been recorded, humanly speaking, Haman would have carried his point. In this manner, by a concurrence of circumstances, each of them, if considered singly, apparently trivial, and all of them contingent with respect to any human foresight or prevention, the Lord often pours contempt upon the wise and the mighty, and defeats their deepest laid and best concerted schemes, in the moment when they promise themselves success.

Many salutary and comfortable inferences may be drawn from the consideration of this subject. Some of them I may perhaps have formerly mentioned, but they will well bear a repetition. We have need to be reminded of what we already know.

1. It should inspire us with confidence. If the Lord of hosts, the Lord of lords, be for us, what weapon or counsel can prosper against us? However dark and threatening appearances may be, we need not tremble for the ark of God. The concernments of his church are in safe hands. The cause so dear to us, is still more dear to him. He has power to support it when it is opposed, and grace to revive it when it is drooping. It has often been brought low, but never has been, never shall be, forsaken. When he will work, none can hinder. Nor need you fear for yourself, if you have committed yourself and your all to him. "The very

* Esther vi. 1.

"hairs of your head are numbered*." There is a hedge of protection† around you, which none can break through without his permission; nor will he permit you to be touched, except when he designs to make a temporary and seeming evil conducive to your real and permanent advantage.

2. It should affect us with an admiring and thankful sense of his condescension. "Lord, what is man, that "thou shouldest be so mindful of him?" "He humbles "himself to behold the things that are in heaven‡." But he stoops still lower. He affords his attention and favour to sinful men. His eye is always upon his people, his ear open to their prayers. Not a sigh or falling tear escapes his notice. He pities them, as a father pities his children; he proportions their trials to their strength, or their strength to their trials, and so adjusts his dispensations to their state, that they never suffer unnecessarily, nor in vain.

3. How great is the dignity and privilege of true believers. Is the man congratulated or envied whom the king delighteth to honour? Believers are more frequently despised than envied in this world. But they may congratulate one another. The King of kings is their friend. They have honours and pleasures which the world knows nothing of. Their titles are high, they are the "sons and the daughters of the Lord Al-"mighty§." Their possessions are great, for "all things "are theirs‖." They are assured of what is best for them in this life, and of life eternal hereafter. They are now nearly related to the King of kings, and shall ere long be acknowledged and owned by him, before

* Matth. x. 30. † Job. i. 10. ‡ Psal. cxiii. 6.
§ 2 Cor. vi. 18. ‖ 1 Cor. iii. 21.

assembled worlds. They who now account the proud happy, will be astonished and confounded when they shall see the righteous, whom they once undervalued, "shine forth like the sun in the kingdom of God."

4. We may lastly infer the extreme folly and danger of those who persist in their rebellion and opposition against this King of kings, and Lord of lords. Though he exercises much patience and long-suffering towards them for a season, the hour is approaching when his wrath will burn like fire. It is written, and must be fulfilled, "the wicked shall be turned into hell, and all "the nations that forget God*." Oh! the solemnities of that great day, when the frame of nature shall be dissolved, when the Judge shall appear, the books be opened, and all mankind shall be summoned to his tribunal! Will not you yet tremble and bow before him ye careless ones, while he is seated upon a throne of grace, and while the door of mercy stands open? Once more I call, I warn, I charge you, to repent, and believe the Gospel. If to-day you will hear his voice, it is not yet too late. But who can answer for to-morrow? Perhaps "this night your soul may be required "of you†." Are you prepared for the summons? If not seize the present opportunity. Attend to the "one "thing needful." Seek his face, that your soul may live. If not, remember that you are warned; your blood will be upon your own head. We have delivered our message, and if you finally reject it, you must answer for yourselves to him whose message it is.

* Psal. ix. 17. † Luke xii. 20.

PART III.

SERMON XXXIX.

JOB'S FAITH AND EXPECTATION.

JOB xix. 25, 26.

I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand in the latter day upon the earth. And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.

CHRISTIANITY, that is, the religion of which MESSIAH is the author and object, the foundation, life, and glory, though not altogether as old as the creation, is nearly so. It is coeval with the first promise and intimation of mercy given to fallen man. When Adam by transgression had violated the order and law of his creation, his religion, that is, the right disposition of his heart towards God, was at an end. Sin deprived him at once of faith and hope, of love and joy. He no longer desired, he no longer could bear, the presence of his offended Maker. He vainly sought to avoid it; and when compelled to answer, though he could not deny his guilt, instead of making an ingenuous confession, he attempted to fix the blame upon the woman, or rather indeed upon the Lord himself, who had provided her for him. But mercy, undeserved and undesired, relieved him from a state in which he

become obdurate and desperate. A promise was given him of "the seed of the woman*," which virtually contained, as the seed contains the future plant, the substance of all the subsequent promises which were fulfilled by the incarnation of the Son of God, and by all that he did, or suffered, or obtained for sinners, in the character of Mediator. For a sinner can have no comfortable intercourse with the holy God, but through a Mediator. Therefore the apostle observes of the patriarchs and servants of God, under the Old Testament, "These all died in faith†." We can say nothing higher than this of the apostles and martyrs under the New Testament. They died, not trusting in themselves that they were righteous, not rejoicing in the works of their own hands, but they died, like the thief upon the cross, in faith, resting all their hope upon him who, by his obedience unto death, "is the end of the law for "righteousness, unto every one that believeth‡." We have greater advantages, in point of light and liberty, than those of old. The prophecies concerning MESSIAH, which, at the time of delivery, were obscure, are to us infallibly interpreted by their accomplishment. And we know that the great atonement, typically pointed out by their sacrifices, has been actually made; that the Lamb of God has, by the one offering of himself, put away sin. But as to the ground and substance, their faith and hope were the same with ours. "Abra-"ham rejoiced to see the day of Christ§;" and aged Jacob soon after he had said, "I have waited for thy sal-"vation, O Lord," died with the same composure and willingness as Simon did, who saw it with his own eyes.

* Gen. iii. 15. † Heb. xi. 13.

‡ Rom. x. 4. § John viii. 36.

Job, who was perhaps contemporary with Jacob, who at least is, with great probability, thought to have lived before Moses, gives us in this passage a strong and clear testimony of his faith. And it forms a beautiful and well-chosen introduction to the third part of the *Messiah*, the principal subject of which is, the present privileges and future prospects of those who believe in the Saviour's name.

The learned are far from being agreed, either in the translation, or in the explanation, of this text. The words *worms* and *body* being printed in Italics in our version, will apprize the attentive English reader, that there are no words answerable to them in the Hebrew. If you omit these words, something will be evidently wanting to make a complete sense. This want different writers have supplied, according to their different judgments; and from hence chiefly has arisen the variety of versions and interpretations. But it would be very improper for me, in this place, to take up your time, and to draw off your attention, from the great concerns which should fill our minds when we meet in the house of God, by giving you a detail of controversies and criticisms, which, after all, are much more uncertain than important. We need not dispute whether Job, in this passage, professes his assurance of the incarnation of MESSIAH, or of his resurrection, or of his final appearance to judge the world; or whether he is only declaring his own personal faith and hope in him. These several senses are not so discordant, that if we determine for one, we must exclude the rest. I shall content myself with the words as I find them. And I hope that, if we should miss some of the precise ideas which Job might have when he spoke, we shall not greatly mistake his

general meaning, nor wander far wide from the scope of the text.

Four things are observable:

I. The title of "Redeemer."

II. The appropriating word, "My."

III. His standing upon "the earth."

IV. Job's expectation of seeing him "in his flesh."

I. The title. There is no name of MESSIAH more significant, comprehensive, or endearing, than the name REDEEMER. The name of *Saviour* expresses what he does for sinners. He saves them from guilt and wrath, from sin, from the present evil world, from the powers of darkness, and from all their enemies. He saves them with an everlasting salvation. But the word "Redeemer," intimates likewise the manner in which he saves them. For it is not merely by the word of his power, as he saved his disciples when in jeopardy upon the lake, by saying to the winds and the seas, "Peace, be still: and "there was a great calm*;" but by price, by paying a ransom for them, and pouring out the blood of his heart, as an atonement for their sins. The Hebrew word for Redeemer, *Goel*, primarily signifies, a near kinsman, or the next of kin. He with whom the right of redemption lay†, and who, by virtue of his nearness of relation, was the legal avenger of blood. Thus MESSIAH took upon him our nature, and by assuming our flesh and blood, became nearly related to us, that he might redeem our forfeited inheritance, restore us to liberty, and avenge our cause against Satan, the enemy and murderer of our souls. But thus he made himself also responsible for us, to pay our debts, and to answer

* Mark iv. 39. † Numb. xxxv. 19—21.; Ruth iv. 1—8.

the demands of the justice and law of God on our behalf. He fulfilled his engagement. He suffered, and he died on this account. But our Redeemer, "who was once dead is now alive, and liveth for "evermore, and has the keys of death and of hades*." This is he of whom Job saith, "I know that "he liveth," (was then living,) though he was not "to stand, upon the earth, until the latter day." He is the living One, having life in himself, "the same "yesterday, to-day, and for ever†." Such was his own language to the Jews, "Before Abraham was, I am‡." Therefore the Redeemer is mighty, and his redemption is sure. He is able to save to the uttermost. His power is unlimited, and his official authority, as Mediator, is founded in a covenant, ratified by his own blood, and by the oath of the unchangeable God§.

II. But Job uses the language of appropriation. He says, "*My* Redeemer." And all that we know, or hear, or speak of him, will avail us but little, unless we are really and personally interested in him as *Our* Redeemer. A cold speculative knowledge of the Gospel, such as a lawyer has of a will or a deed, which he reads with no further design than to understand the tenour and import of the writing, will neither save nor comfort the soul. The believer reads it, as the will is read by the heir, who finds his own name in it, and is warranted by it to call the estate, and all the particulars specified, his own. He appropriates the privileges to himself, and says, The promises are mine; the pardon, the peace, the heaven, of which I read, are all mine. This is the will and testament of the Redeemer, of my

* Rev. i. 18. † Heb. xiii. 8.
‡ John viii. 58. § Psal. cx. 4.

Redeemer. The great Testator remembered me in his will, which is confirmed and rendered valid by his death*; and therefore I humbly claim, and assuredly expect, the benefit of all that he has bequeathed. But how shall we obtain this comfortable persuasion, and preserve it against all the cavils of our enemies, who will endeavour to litigate our right? I seem to have before me a proper occasion of discussing a point, very important, and by too many misunderstood; I mean, the nature of that assurance of hope, which the Scripture speaks of as attainable, which has been happily experienced by many believers, and which all are exhorted and encouraged to seek after, in the methods of God's appointment. But my plan will only permit me to offer a few brief hints upon the subject.

1. Many respectable writers and preachers have considered this assurance as essential to true faith. But we have the Scripture in our hands, and are not bound to abide by the decisions of any man, further than as they agree with this standard. The most eminent properties, or effects ascribed to faith, are, "that it works "by love†," "purifies the heart‡," and "overcomes "the world§." I think it cannot easily be denied, by those who are competent judges in the case, that there are persons to be found, who give these evidences that they are believers, and yet are far from the possession of an abiding assurance. They hope they love the Lord, but there is such a disproportion between the sensible exercise of their love, and the conviction they have of their obligations to him, that they are often afraid they do not love him supremely; and if not, they know that

* Heb. ix. 16. † Gal. v. 6.
‡ Acts xv. 9. § 1 John v. 4.

in the Scriptural sense they do not love him at all. They can say from their hearts that they desire to love him, but they dare not go further. But there is a weak and a strong faith; they differ not in kind, but only in degree. Faith is compared to "a grain of mustard-seed*," which, under the cultivation of the heavenly Husbandman, who first sows the seed in the heart, grows up to assurance. But in its infant and weak state, it is true and acceptable faith. Far from "breaking the bruised reed†," he will strengthen it. "He will not quench the smoking flax," but will in due time fan it into a flame.

2. I will go a step further. Were I to define the assurance we are speaking of, I should perhaps say, *It is*, in our present state, *the combined effect of faith and ignorance*. That assurance which does not spring from true faith in the Son of God, wrought by the operation of the Holy Spirit, is no better than presumption. But I believe what we call *assurance*, even when it is right, is not entirely owing to the strength of our faith, but in a great measure to our having such faint and slight views of some truths, which, if we had a more powerful impression of them, unless our faith was likewise proportionably strengthened at the same time, might possibly make the strongest assurance totter and tremble. I will explain myself. Admitting that I had a right to tell you, that I am so far assured of my interest in the Gospel salvation, as to have no perplexing doubt either of my acceptance or of my perseverance, you would much over-rate me, if you should suppose this was a proof that my faith is very strong. Alas! I have but a very slight perception of the evil of sin, of the deceitfulness of my own heart, of the force and subtilty of my spiritual

* Matth. xvii. 20. † Isa. xlii. 3.

enemies, of the strictness and spirituality of the holy law, or of the awful majesty and holiness of the great God with whom I have to do. If, in the moment while I am speaking to you, he should be pleased to impress these solemn realities upon my mind, with a conviction and evidence tenfold greater than I have ever known hitherto, (which I conceive would still be vastly short of the truth,) unless my faith was also strengthened by a tenfold clearer and more powerful discovery of the grace and glory of the Saviour, you would probably see my countenance change, and my speech falter. The Lord, in compassion to our weakness, shows us these things, by little and little, as we are able to bear them; and if, as we advance in the knowledge of ourselves and of our dangers, our knowledge of the unsearchable riches of Christ advances equally, we may rejoice in hope, we may even possess an assured hope. But "let "not him who hath put on his harness, boast as though "he had put it off*." We are yet in an enemy's land, and know not what changes we may meet with, before our warfare is finished.

3. How far our assurance is solid, may be estimated by the effects. It will surely make us humble, spiritual, peaceful, and patient. I pity those who talk confidently of their hope, as if they were out of the reach of doubts and fears, while their tempers are unsanctified, and their hearts are visibly attached to the love of the present world. I fear they know but little of what they say. I am better pleased when persons of this character complain of doubts and darkness. It proves at least that they are not destitute of feeling, nor, as yet, lulled into a spirit of careless security. And there are

* 1 Kings xx. 11.

professors, whom, instead of endeavouring to comfort in their present state, I would rather wish to make still more suspicious of themselves than they are; till they are convinced of the impossibility of enjoying true peace, while their hearts are divided between God and the world. For though sanctification is not the ground of a good hope, it is the certain concomitant of it. If it be true, "that without holiness no man shall see the "Lord*;" it must likewise be true, that without holiness no man can have a Scriptural and well-founded hope of seeing him.

4. But to give a direct answer to the inquiry, How shall I know that he is my Redeemer? I may use the prophet's words, "Then shall ye know, if ye follow "on to know the Lord†." Our names are not actually inserted in the Bible, but our characters are described there. He is the Redeemer of all who put their trust in him. You *will* not trust in him, unless you feel your need of him; you *cannot*, unless you know him as he is revealed in the word; you *do not*, unless you love him, and are devoted to his cause and service. If you know yourself to be a sinner deserving to perish, if that you see there is no help or hope for you but in Jesus, and venture yourself upon his gracious invitation, believing that he is able to save to the uttermost; and if you include holiness and a deliverance from sin, in the idea of the salvation which you long for, then he is your Redeemer. If, among us, an act of grace was published, inviting all criminals to surrender themselves, with a promise of mercy to those who did; though no one was mentioned by name in the act, yet every one who complied with it, and pleaded it, would be entitled

* Heb. xii. 14. † Hos. vi. 3.

to the benefit. Such an act of grace is the Gospel. The Lord says, "This is my beloved Son, hear him*." If you approve him, he is yours. If you are still perplexed with doubts, they are owing to the weakness of your faith. But there are means appointed for the growth of faith. Wait patiently upon the Lord in the use of those means, and you shall find he has not bid you seek his face in vain. Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness. Live not in the omission of known duty. Do not perplex yourself with vain reasonings, but believe and obey, and the Lord shall be with you. There are some peculiar cases. Allowances must be made for the effects of constitution and temperament. Some sincere persons are beset and followed, through life, with distressing temptations. But in general, simplicity and obedience lead to assurance. And they who hearken to the Lord, and walk in the way of his commandments, "go on from strength to "strength †," their peace and hope increase, like a river, which, from small beginnings, runs broader and deeper, till it falls into the ocean. But to return to Job:—

III. Another article of his creed concerning the Redeemer, is, "He shall stand in the latter day upon the "earth." The latter or last days, in the prophetical style, usually denote the MESSIAH's day, the times of the Gospel. To this time Job looked forward. He beheld the promises afar off. Thus MESSIAH was the consolation of his people of old, as he who *was* to come. And it should be our consolation, to know that he *is* come. His standing upon the earth may include the whole of his appearance in the flesh; his life, passion,

* Mark ix. 7. † Psal. lxxxiv. 7.

and resurrection. The manner of expression intimates something important and wonderful. Had Job, in the spirit of prophecy, spoken of any individual of Adam's race, of Isaiah, or Paul, there would have been nothing extraordinary predicted by saying he shall stand upon the earth, for all men do so in their successive generations. But that the Redeemer, the Lord of glory, the Maker of all things, should condescend to visit his creatures, to dwell with men for a season, to stand and walk upon the earth with them, clothed in a body like their own, is an event which never could have been expected, if it had not been revealed from heaven. It was the object of Job's faith, and well deserving the solemn preface with which he introduces his firm persuasion of it, "Oh! that my words were graven with an iron pen "in the rock for ever!" When Solomon had finished the temple of the Lord of hosts, instead of admiring the magnificence of the building, he was struck with the condescension of the Lord, who would vouchsafe to notice it, and honour it with a symbol of his presence. "Will God indeed dwell with men upon the earth? "Behold the heaven of heavens cannot contain him, "how much less this house which I have built*!" But what was the visible glory which appeared in that temple, if compared with the glory of the only begotten Son of God, when he tabernacled in our flesh! The human nature of Christ is that true temple, not made with hands, in which God is manifested upon a throne of grace, that sinners may approach him without dismay, and receive, out of his fulness, grace for grace. To him all the prophets gave witness, on him the desire and hope of his people, in all ages, have been fixed.

* 1 Kings viii. 27.

He was to stand upon the earth, as Mediator between God and man. And in the same office, now he is upon the throne of glory; he is, and will be, admired, adored, and trusted in, by all his believing people, to the end of time.

IV. From the Redeemer's appearance upon earth, Job infers the restoration and resurrection of his own body. His trials had been great—bereaved of his children and substance, afflicted with grievous boils, harassed with temptations, reproached by his friends: out of all these troubles the Lord his Redeemer delivered him, and his latter days were more prosperous than his beginning. But he knew that he must go the way of all the earth, that his body must lie in the grave, and return to dust. But he expected a future time after his dissolution, when in the flesh, for himself, and with his own eyes, he should see God. The expressions are strong and repeated. He does not speak the language of hesitation and doubt, but of confidence and certainty. It likewise appears that he placed his ultimate happiness in seeing God. His words are not very different from those of the apostle, "When he shall "appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as "he is*." To behold the glory of God, as our Redeemer, to be in a state of favour and communion with him, and, according to the utmost capacity of our nature, to be conformed to him in holiness and love, is that felicity which God has promised, and to which all his servants aspire. Some foretastes of it they enjoy in the present life, which cheer them under their trials, and raise them above the grovelling pursuits of those who have their portion only in this world. But their

* 1 John iii. 2.

chief possession is in hope. They look forward to a brighter period, when they shall awaken from the sleep of death, "to behold his face in righteousness*." Then, and not till then, they shall be completely satisfied. The expectation of Job, therefore, affords a sufficient proof that the doctrines of an immortal state, and of a resurrection unto life were included in the revelations which God afforded to his people in the earliest times; and, consequently, that the religion of the Old Testament and of the New is substantially the same.

The great inquiry this subject should impress upon us, is, Are we thus minded? What think you, my dear friends, of Christ? Have you accepted him as your Redeemer? and have you a good hope that you shall see him to your comfort, when he shall return to judge the world? If so, you may rejoice. Changes you must expect. You must die, and your flesh must be food for worms. But he has promised to "change our "vile bodies, that they may be fashioned like unto his "glorious body according to the mighty power where-"by he is able to subdue all things unto himself†."

* Psal. xvii. 15. † Phil. iii. 21.

SERMON XL.

THE LORD IS RISEN INDEED.

1 CORINTHIANS XV. 20.

But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept.

AS, in the animal economy, the action of the heart and of the lungs, though very different, are equally necessary for the maintenance of life, and we cannot say that either of them is more essentially requisite than the other; so, in the system of divine revelation, there are some truths, the knowledge and belief of which, singly considered, are fundamentals with respect to the salvation of a sinner. And though they are distinct in themselves, we cannot determine which of them is of most importance to us; for unless we know, approve, and receive them all, we can have no experience of a life of faith in the Son of God. Such, for instance, is the Scriptural doctrine concerning the depravity of human nature. This is a first principle; for unless we understand what our state is in the sight of God, the enormity of our transgressions, and our incapacity for true happiness until our hearts are changed by the power of his grace, we cannot rightly understand a single chapter in the Bible. Such, likewise, is the doctrine of the atonement. For if we could know how totally we are lost, without knowing the gracious method which God has appointed for our recovery, we must unavoidably sink into despair. Again, if we were sensible of our state as sinners, and even if we trusted in

Christ for salvation, yet the apostle observes in this chapter, that unless he be indeed risen from the dead, our faith in him would be in vain, and we should still be in our sins. The resurrection of Christ, therefore, is a doctrine absolutely essential to our hope and comfort; and it is likewise a sure pledge, that they who believe in him shall be raised from the dead also, by virtue of their union with him, and according to his pattern. For "now is Christ risen from the dead, "and is become the first fruits of them that slept." Let us at present consider his resurrection The sure consequence of it, that his people shall be raised from the dead, will offer to our meditations from the following verses.

The resurrection of Christ being, as a fact, the great pillar upon which the weight and importance of Christianity rest; it is has pleased the Lord to put the indubitable proof of it within our power. There is no one point of ancient uninspired history so certainly and unquestionably authenticated. It may seem unnecessary to prove it, and to many of you it is entirely so. Yet I think it proper to take some notice of it; not so much on account of the weak and trifling cavils of infidels, as for the sake of persons who may be assaulted with temptations. For many plain people, who are not much acquainted with the subtilties of sceptics, are sometimes pestered with difficulties and objections in their own minds, perhaps more shrewd and powerful than such as are commonly found in books, or retailed in coffee-houses. For unbelief is deeply rooted in every heart; and Satan, our great enemy, can, and if permitted will, work powerfully upon this evil disposition. He endeavours to beat us off from the belief of every truth of Scripture, and of this among the rest. And

many persons, who have been so well convinced that our Lord rose from the dead, as to venture their souls and their all upon it, have found themselves at a loss how to answer the enemy in an hour of sharp and pressing temptation.

Let us suppose, then, that we had lately received the news of some extraordinary and almost incredible event, and let us consider what evidence we should require to satisfy us that the report was true, and apply the same kind of reasoning to the point in hand. That there was, a great while ago, a person named Jesus, who gathered disciples, and died upon a cross, is universally acknowledged. Both Jews and Heathens, who lived at the time and afterwards, not only admitted it, but urged it as a reproach against his followers. Many testimonies of this kind are still extant.

The turning point between his enemies and his friends is his resurrection. This has been denied. We acknowledge that he did not appear publicly after he arose, as he did before his death, but only to a competent number of his followers, to whom he showed himself, and satisfied them, by many infallible proofs, that he was alive, and that he was the same person whom they had seen crucified. They reported what they saw, and we believe their report. We are therefore to inquire, who they were? and on what grounds we receive and rely upon their testimony?

If they were mistaken themselves, or if they were engaged and agreed in a crafty design of imposing upon mankind, we who depend upon their relation may be involved in their mistake, or deceived by their artifice. But if neither of these suppositions can possibly be true, if they were competent and impartial witnesses, then we are not only justified in giving credit to

their testimony, but it must be unreasonable, and, (in a case of this importance,) presumptuous and dangerous, to reject it.

I. That they were competent judges of what they asserted, is evident,

1. From their numbers. The eye-witnesses of this fact were many. "He was seen of Cephas, then of "the twelve; after that he was seen of five hundred "brethren at once; after that he was seen of James, "then of all the apostles; and last of all, he was seen "of me also*." Thus Paul wrote when multitudes who lived at the time were still living, and would readily have contradicted him, if he had declared an untruth. Five hundred concurring witnesses are sufficient to establish the credit of a fact, which they all saw with their own eyes, if their word may be depended upon. We can be certain of things which we never saw no otherwise than by the testimony of others. And certainty may be attained in this way. For though some persons would appropriate the word *demonstration* to *mathematical* evidence, yet *moral* evidence may be in many cases equally conclusive, and compel assent with equal force. I am so fully satisfied by the report of others, that there are such cities as Paris and Rome, though I never saw them, that I am no more able seriously to question their existence, than I am to doubt the truth of a proposition in Euclid which I have seen demonstrated.

2. From the nature of the fact; in which it was not possible that so many persons could be mistaken or deceived. Some of them saw him, not once only, but frequently. His appearance to others was attended

* 1 Cor. xv. 5—8.

with peculiar, striking circumstances and effects. His disciples seem not to have expected his resurrection, though he had often foretold it previous to his sufferings. Nor did they hastily credit the women who first saw him in their way from the sepulchre. Thomas refused to believe the report of all his brethren, to whom our Lord had shown himself. He would see for himself; he required more than ocular proof; for he said, "Except I put my finger into the print of the nails, "and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe*." It is no wonder, that when these proofs were offered him, he fully yielded to conviction, and with gratitude and joy addressed his risen Saviour in the language of adoration and love, "My Lord and my God!" But his former conduct showed that he was not credulous, nor disposed to receive the report as a truth, however desirable, without sufficient evidence.

II. As they were competent judges, so they were upright and faithful witnesses. There is no more room to suspect that they had a design to deceive others, than that they were mistaken or deceived themselves. For,

1. If we judge of them by their writings, we must at least allow them to have been well-meaning men. They profess to aim at promoting the knowledge and honour of the true God, and thereby to promote the morality and happiness of mankind. Their conduct was uniformly consistent with their profession, and their doctrines and precepts were evidently suited to answer their design. The penmen of the New Testament were confessedly men in private life, most of them destitute of literature, and engaged in low occupations,

* John xx. 25.

till they became the disciples of Jesus. Is it probable that men, who speak so honourably of God, who inculcate upon their fellow-creatures such an entire devotedness to his will and service, should be impostors themselves? Is it at all credible, that a few men, in an obscure situation, should form a consistent and well-concerted plan, sufficient to withstand and overcome the prejudices, habits, and customs, both of Jews and Heathens; to institute a new religion, and, without the assistance of interest or arms, to spread it rapidly and successfully in a few years throughout the greatest part of the Roman empire? Or is it possible that such men could, at their first effort, exhibit a scheme of theology and morality, so vastly superior to the united endeavours of the philosophers of all ages? A learned man in France attempted to prove, (for what will not learned men attempt?) that most of the Latin poems which are attributed to those whom we call the Classic writers, and particularly the Æneid of Virgil, were not the production of the authors whose names they bear, but gross forgeries, fabricated by monks in the dark ages of ignorance, and successfully obtruded upon the world as genuine, till *he* arose to detect the imposture. He gained but few proselytes to his absurd paradox. Yet, to suppose that men who could only express their own dull sentiments in barbarous Latin, were capable of writing with the fire and elegance of Virgil, when they undertook to impose upon the world; or to affirm that the *Principia* of sir Isaac Newton was in reality written by an ignorant ploughman, and only sent abroad under the sanction of a celebrated name; cannot be more repugnant to true taste, sound judgment, and common sense, than to imagine that the evangelists and apostles were, from their own resources, capable of writing such a

book as the New Testament; the whole of which must stand or fall with the doctrine of our Lord's resurrection.

2. But further: They could not possibly propose any advantage to themselves in their endeavours to propagate the Christian religion, if they had not been assured that the crucified Jesus, whom they preached, was risen from the dead, and had taken possession of his kingdom. Knowing whom they had believed, filled with a constraining sense of his love, and depending upon his promise and power to support them in the service to which he had called them, they were neither ashamed nor afraid to proclaim his Gospel, and to invite and enjoin sinners every where to put their trust in him; otherwise they had nothing to expect but such treatment as they actually met with, for professing their belief of his resurrection, and especially for the pains they took to publish it, first among the people who had put him to death, and afterwards among the Heathens. It required no great sagacity to foresee that this doctrine would be an offence to the Jews, and foolishness to the Greeks*. They were in fact despised, hated, opposed, and persecuted, wherever they went; and those who espoused their cause were immediately exposed to a participation in their sufferings. Nor was there the least probability that the event could be otherwise. Impostors there have been many; but we cannot conceive that any set of men would deliberately, and by consent, contrive an imposture, which, in the nature of the thing, could procure nothing to them, or to their followers, but contempt, stripes, imprisonment, and death.

* 1 Cor. i. 23.

3. Even if we could, for a moment, suppose them capable of so wild and wicked an undertaking as, under pretence of the service of God, to provoke and dare the hatred of mankind, by asserting and propagating an offensive falsehood, it would be impossible upon that ground to account for the success which they meet with. If this council and cause had not been of God, it must have come to nought*. But by preaching Jesus and his resurrection, in defiance of all the arts and rage of their enemies, they mightily prevailed over the established customs and inveterate prejudices of mankind, and brought multitudes into the belief of their doctrine against all disadvantages. The Lord confirmed their word with signs following. The miracles which were wrought in the name of Jesus were numerous, notorious, and undeniable; and the moral effects of their preaching, though too frequent and universal to be styled miraculous, were such as can only be with reason ascribed to a divine power. The pillars of Paganism, the superstitions of idol worship, though in every country connected and incorporated with the frame of civil government, and guarded for ages, not more by popular veneration than for reasons of state, were very soon shaken, and in no great space of time subverted. Within about two hundred years after Tacitus had described the Christians as the objects of universal contempt and hatred, Christianity became the established religion of the empire. And in a letter of Pliny to Trajan on the subject, we have indisputable evidence, that even in the time of Tacitus, hated, vilified, and persecuted as the Christians were, their religion so greatly prevailed, that in many places the idol temples were almost deserted.

* Acts v. 38.

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IV. From the Redeemer's appearance upon earth, Job infers the restoration and resurrection of his own body. His trials had been great—bereaved of his children and substance, afflicted with grievous boils, harassed with temptations, reproached by his friends: out of all these troubles the Lord his Redeemer delivered him, and his latter days were more prosperous than his beginning. But he knew that he must go the way of all the earth, that his body must lie in the grave, and return to dust. But he expected a future time after his dissolution, when in the flesh, for himself, and with his own eyes, he should see God. The expressions are strong and repeated. He does not speak the language of hesitation and doubt, but of confidence and certainty. It likewise appears that he placed his ultimate happiness in seeing God. His words are not very different from those of the apostle, "When he shall "appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as "he is*." To behold the glory of God, as our Redeemer, to be in a state of favour and communion with him, and, according to the utmost capacity of our nature, to be conformed to him in holiness and love, is that felicity which God has promised, and to which all his servants aspire. Some foretastes of it they enjoy in the present life, which cheer them under their trials, and raise them above the grovelling pursuits of those who have their portion only in this world. But their

* 1 John iii. 2.

chief possession is in hope. They look forward to a brighter period, when they shall awaken from the sleep of death, "to behold his face in righteousness*." Then, and not till then, they shall be completely satisfied. The expectation of Job, therefore, affords a sufficient proof that the doctrines of an immortal state, and of a resurrection unto life were included in the revelations which God afforded to his people in the earliest times; and, consequently, that the religion of the Old Testament and of the New is substantially the same.

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* Psal. xvii. 15. † Phil. iii. 21.

SERMON XLI.

DEATH BY ADAM, LIFE BY CHRIST.

1 Corinthians xv. 21, 22.

For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

FROM Mr. Handel's acknowledged abilities as a composer, and particularly from what I have heard of his great taste and success in adapting the style of his music to the subject, I judge, that this passage afforded him a fair occasion of displaying his genius and powers. Two ideas, vastly important in themselves, are here represented in the strongest light, by being placed in contrast to each other. Surely the most solemn, the most pathetic strains must be employed, if they accord with the awful words, "By man came death," "In Adam "all die." Nor can even the highest efforts of the heavenly harpers, more than answer to the joy, the triumph, and the praise, which the other part of my text would excite in our hearts, if we are interested in it, provided we were capable of comprehending the full force and meaning of the expressions, "By man came "also the resurrection," "In Christ shall all be made "alive."

By one man came death, "By one man sin entered "into the world, and death by sin*." Sin opened the door to death. The creation, at the beginning, was

* Rom. v. 12.

full of order and beauty. "God saw every thing that "he had made, and behold all was very good*." Adam, happy in the image and favour of his Maker, breathed the air of immortality in Paradise. While moral evil was unknown, natural evils, such as sickness, pain, and death, had no place. How different has the state of things been since! Would you account for the change? Charge it upon man. He sinned against his Creator, Lawgiver, and Benefactor; and thus, by him, came death. The fact is sure; and therefore our reasonings upon it, in order to account for it, further than we are enlightened and taught by Scripture, are unnecessary and vain. God is infinitely wise, and therefore this change was foreseen by him. He doubtless could have prevented it, for to Omnipotence every thing that does not imply a contradiction, is possible, is easy. But he permitted it, and therefore it must have been agreeable to his wisdom, holiness, and goodness, to permit it. He can over-rule it to the purposes of his own glory, and to ends worthy of himself, and he has assured us that he will do so. Thus far I can go, nor do I wish to go further. An endeavour to vindicate the ways of God to man, to fallen man, upon the grounds of what he proudly calls his reason, would be an impracticable, and, in my view, a presumptuous attempt. In proportion as his grace enlightens our minds, convinces us of our ignorance, and humbles our pride, we shall be satisfied, that, in whatever he appoints or permits, he acts in a manner becoming his own perfections. Nor can we be satisfied in any other way. We see, we feel, that evil is in the world. Death reigns. It has pleased God to afford us a revelation, to visit us with

* Gen. i. 31.

the light of his Gospel. If, instead of reasoning, we believe and obey, a way is set before us, by which we may finally overcome every evil, and obtain a happiness and honour, superior to what belonged to man in his original state. They who refuse this Gospel, must be left to their cavils and perplexities, until the day in which the great Judge and Governor of all shall arise to plead his own cause, and to vindicate his proceedings from their arrogant exceptions. Then "every "mouth will be stopped*." Let us look to the heavens, which are higher than we; and attend to what we may learn from sure principles, that the earth, with all its inhabitants, is but as dust upon the balance, if compared with the immensity of God's creation. Unless we could know the whole, and the relation which this very small part bears to the rest of his government, we must be utterly incompetent to judge how it becomes the great God to act. We are infected with the sin, and we are subject to the death, with all its concomitant evils, which came into the world by the first man. But we are likewise invited to a participation of all the blessings which the second Man has procured, by his atonement for sin, and by his victory over death. "For "as by man came death, so by man came also the re-"surrection of the dead."

Let us take a survey, first of the malady, and then of the remedy.

I. The malady; the effect and wages of sin is "death." Many ideas are included in this word, taken in the Scriptural sense.

1. The sentence annexed to the transgression of that commandment which was given as an especial test of

* Rom. iii. 19.

Adam's obedience, and which affects all his posterity, is thus expressed, " In the day that thou eatest—thou " shalt surely die*." But man was not, ordinarily, to die by a stroke of apoplexy, or by a flash of lightning. The sentence includes all the natural evils, all the variety of wo, which sin has brought into the world.—The rebellious tempers and appetites which so often cut short the life of man, together with the sufferings and troubles which, sooner or later, bring him down with sorrow to the grave, being the consequences of sin, may be properly considered as belonging to that death in which they terminate. Even the earth and the elements partook in the effects of man's disobedience. " Thorns and thistles†" were not the produce of the ground till after he had sinned. Nor can I suppose that hurricanes, floods, and earthquakes, were known in a state of innocence. But had the whole earth been a paradise, man, having sinned, must have been miserable. It is not in situation to make that heart happy which is the seat of inordinate passions, rage, envy, malice, lust, and avarice. And were the earth a paradise now, it would be stained with blood, and filled with violence, cruelty, and misery, while it is inhabited by sinners. Many persons at present, who dwell in stately houses, and have every thing around them that is suited to gratify and please their senses, know, by painful experience, how little happiness these external advantages afford, while their minds are tortured with disappointments and anxiety. Thus the outward afflictions which every where surround and assail the sinner, and the malignant passions which,

* Gen ii. 17. † Gen. iii. 18

like vultures, continually gnaw his heart, all combine to accelerate the execution of the sentence of death.

2. "Death," in a very important sense, entered immediately with sin. Besides the rational life which still distinguishes man from the brute creation, he originally possessed a spiritual and divine life; for he was created in the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness. He was capable of communion with God, of rejoicing in his favour, and of proposing his will and glory as the great end of his actions. In a word, the presence and life of God dwelt in him, as in a temple. As the soul is the life of the body, which becomes a carcass, a prey to worms and putrefaction, when the soul has forsaken it; so God is the life of the soul.—Sin defaced his temple, and he forsook it. In this sense, when Adam had transgressed the law, he died instantly, in that very day, in that very moment. He lost his spiritual life, he lost all desire for communion with God, he no longer retained any love for his Benefactor. He dreaded his presence, he sought to hide himself from him, and when obliged to appear and answer, stood self-condemned before him, till revived and restored by the promise of grace. And thus his posterity derive from him what may be called a living death. They are dead while they live, "dead in tres-"passes and sins*," till they are again quickened by his Holy Spirit. This is not a subject of common-place declamation; it is to be proved by the tenour of Scripture, the nature of redemption, and the very reason of things. Unless we allow that man in his present state is thus fallen, depraved, and dead, we must be reduced

* Eph. ii. 1.

to the absurdity of supposing, that God made him such a creature as he now is: that when he formed him for himself, and endued him with a capacity and desires, which nothing short of his own infinite goodness can satisfy, he should at the same time create him with a disposition to hate his Maker, to seek his satisfaction in sensuality upon a level with the brutes, and to confine his views and pursuits within the limits of this precarious life, while he feels, in defiance of himself, an instinctive thirst for immortality. Man, considered in this view, would be a solecism in the creation; and they who do not acquiesce in the cause which the Scripture assigns for the inconsistencies and contradictions which are found in his character, will never be able to assign any other cause, which will bear the trial of sober and rational examination. What the poet says of Beelzebub, "Majestic though in ruins," may be truly affirmed of man. His faculties and powers are proofs of his original greatness; his awful misapplication of them equally prove that he is a fallen and ruined creature. He has lost his true life, he is dead in sin; and unless renewed and revived by the grace of God, can only, in a future state, be fit for the company of the fallen angels.

3. "Death," as the wages of sin, extends still further. There is the "second death," the final and eternal misery of soul and body in hell. This we know is the dreadful lot of the impenitent. We need no other proof that this was included in the sentence; for, certainly, the righteous Judge would not inflict a greater punishment than he had denounced. Indeed, it follows of course in the very nature of things, if we admit the soul to be immortal, a resurrection both of the just and the unjust, and that there remains no other sacri-

fice for sin, in favour of those who reject the Gospel. For to be disowned of God in the great day, to be separated from his favourable presence, and conscious of his endless displeasure; to be abandoned to the unrestrained rage of sinful dispositions and hopeless despair; to be incessantly tormented by the stings of a remorseful conscience, must be, upon the principles of Scripture, the unavoidable consequences of being cut off by death, in an unhumbled, unpardoned, unsanctified state.

II. But, blessed be God, the Gospel reveals a relief and remedy fully adapted to the complicated misery in which sin has involved us. "As by man came death, "by man came also the resurrection of the dead." MESSIAH has made an end of sin, and destroyed the power of death. They who "believe in him, though "they were dead, shall live*." For he is the Resurrection of the dead, and the Life of the living.

1. He raises the soul from the death of sin unto a life of righteousness. By his blood he procures a right and liberty, and by his Spirit he communicates a power, that those who were afar off, may draw nigh to God. Thus, even at present, believers are said to be "risen "with him†." Their spiritual life is renewed, and their happiness is already commenced, though it be as yet subject to abatements.

First, Though when they are made partakers of his grace, and thereby delivered from the condemning power of the law, sin has no longer dominion over them, as formerly; yet it still wars and strives within them, and their life is a state of continual warfare.—They now approve the law of God "as holy, just, and

* John xi. 25. † Col. iii. 1.

" good, and delight in it after the inward man," yet they are renewed but in part. They " feel a law in " their members warring against the law of their minds. " They cannot do the things that they would, nor as " they would: for when they would do good, evil is " present with them*." They are conscious of a defect and a defilement attending their best services. Their attainments are unspeakably short of the desires which love to the Redeemer has raised in their hearts. They are ashamed, and sometimes almost discouraged. They adopt the apostle's language, " Oh wretched man that " I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this " death?" But with him they can likewise say, " I " thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." They know he is on their side, and expect that he will at last " make them more than conquerors:" yet, while the conflict lasts they have much to suffer, and much to lament.

Secondly, They are subject, like our people, to the various calamities and distresses incident to this state of mortality; and they have, more or less, troubles peculiar to themselves, arising from the nature of their profession and conduct, (if they are faithful to their Lord,) while they live in a world that lieth in wickedness. But the curse and sting is taken out of their afflictions, and they are so moderated and sanctified by the wisdom and grace of him whom they serve, that in the event they work for their good. But though they " yield " the peaceful fruit of righteousness†," in themselves, and at the time, they are not joyous, but grievous.

Thirdly, They are still subject to the stroke of death, the separation of soul and body. But this death has lost

* Rom. vii. 19—23. † Heb. xii. 11.

its sting, as to them. And therefore they are said not to die, but to sleep in Jesus. Death is not their enemy, but their friend. To them, instead of being an evil, it proves a deliverance from all evil, and an entrance into everlasting life.

2. That new life to which they are raised, is surely connected with life eternal; the life of grace with the life of glory. For Christ liveth in them, and being united to him by faith, they shall live while he liveth. They only shut their eyes upon the pains and sorrows of this world, to open them immediately in his presence, and so "they shall be for ever with the Lord." How wonderful and happy is the transition! From disease and anguish, from weeping friends, and often from a state of indigence and obscurity, in which they have no friends to compassionate them, they remove to a state of glory, honour, and immortality, to a mansion in the realms of light, to a seat near the throne of God. In the language of mortals, this ineffable honour and happiness is shadowed out to us, by the emblems of a white robe, a golden harp, a palm branch, (the token of victory,) and a crown, not of oak or laurel, of gold or diamonds, but "a crown of life." Such honour have all the saints. However afflicted or neglected, despised or oppressed, while upon earth, soon as their willing spirits take their flight from hence, they shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Thus Lazarus lay for a time, diseased, necessitous, and slighted, at the rich man's gate. Yet he was not without attendants. A guard of angels waited around him, and when he died conveyed his spirit into "Abraham's bosom*." The Jews thought very highly of Abraham, the father

* Luke xvi. 22.

of their nation, the father of the faithful. Our Lord therefore teaches us, by this representation, that the beggar Lazarus was not only happy after death, but highly exalted by him who seeth not as man seeth; for he was placed in "Abraham's bosom," a situation which, according to the custom of the Jews, was a mark of peculiar favour, intimacy, and distinction. Thus the beloved disciple was seated in the bosom of our Lord, when he celebrated his last passover with his disciples*.

3. Their dead bodies shall be raised at the great day, not in their former state of weakness and corruption, but that which was "sown in weakness shall be "raised in power," and the "mortal shall put on im-"mortality. He shall change our vile body, that it "may be fashioned according to the likeness of his "own glorious body." So that his own resurrection is both the pledge and the pattern of theirs. I have only further to observe upon this subject at present, that as Adam is the root and head of all mankind, from whence they all derive a sinful and mortal nature; so Jesus, the second Adam, is the root of a people who are united to him, planted and ingrafted in him by faith. To these the resurrection, considered as a blessing, is to be restrained. There will be a resurrection of the wicked likewise†, but to condemnation, "shame, and "everlasting contempt‡." But the connexion is close and indissoluble between Christ the first-fruits, and them that are Christ's at his coming.

May we be happily prepared for this great event, "that when he shall appear we may have confidence

* John xiii. 22—25. † John. v. 29. ‡ Dan. xii. 2.

"in him, and not be ashamed before him*." Happy they who shall then be able to welcome him in the language of the prophet, "Lo, this is our God, we have "waited for him, and he will save us; this is the Lord, "we have waited for him, we will be glad, and rejoice "in his salvation†." But how awful the contrast of those, (many of them once the great, mighty, and honourable of the earth,) who shall behold him with horror, and in the anguish of their souls shall call, (in vain,) "to "the rocks and mountains to fall on them and hide them "from his presence, saying, The great day of his wrath "is come, and who shall be able to stand‡?"

SERMON XLII.

THE GENERAL RESURRECTION.

1 Corinthians xv. 51, 52.

Behold, I show you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump, for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

AN object in itself great, and which we know to be so, will appear small to us if we view it from a distance. The stars, for example, in our view, are but as little specks or points of light; and the tip of a finger, if held very near to the eye, is sufficient to hide from us the

* 1 John ii. 28. † Isa. xxv. 9. ‡ Rev. vi. 16, 17.

whole body of the sun. Distance of time has an effect upon us, in its kind, similar to distance of space. It diminishes in our mind the idea of what we are assured is, in its own nature, of great magnitude and importance. If any of us were informed that we should certainly die before this day closes, what a sudden and powerful change would take place in our thoughts? That we all must die, is a truth, of which we are no less certain, than that we are now alive. But, because it is possible that we may not die to-day, or to-morrow, or this year, or for several years to come, we are often little more affected by the thoughts of death, than if we expected to live here for ever. In like manner, if you receive the Scripture as a divine revelation, I need offer you no other proof, that there is a day, a great day, approaching, which will put an end to the present state of things, and introduce a state unchangeable and eternal. Then "the Lord will descend with a shout, with the "voice of an archangel, and with the trump of God. "The earth, and all its works, will be burnt up." The great Judge will appear, the tribunal be fixed, the books opened, and all the human race must give an account of themselves to God, and, according to his righteous award, be happy or miserable in a degree beyond expression or conception, and that for ever.

If we were infallibly assured, that this tremendous scene would open upon us to-morrow; or if, while I am speaking, we should be startled with the signs of our Lord's coming in the air, what confusion and alarm would overspread the congregation? Yet, if the Scripture be true, the hour is approaching, when we must all be spectators of this solemn event, and parties nearly interested in it. But, because it is at a distance, we

can hear of it, speak of it, and profess to expect it, with a coolness almost equal to indifference. May the Lord give us that faith which is the evidence of things not seen, that while I aim to lead your meditations to the subject of my text, we may be duly impressed by it: and that we may carry from hence such a consideration of our latter end, as may incline our hearts to that which is our true wisdom!

Many curious inquiries and speculations might be started from this passage, but which, because I judge them to be more curious than useful, it is my intention to waive. I shall confine myself to what is plainly expressed, because I wish rather to profit than to amuse my hearers. The principal subject before us is the resurrection of the dead, in the most pleasing view of it; for my text speaks only of those who shall change the mortal and corruptible, for incorruption and immortality.

I. The introduction, "Behold I show you a "mystery."

II. What we are taught to expect, "We shall not all "sleep, but we shall all be changed."

III. The suddenness of the event, "In a moment, in "the twinkling of an eye."

IV. The grand preceding signal, "The trumpet "shall sound."

I. The apostle apprizes the Corinthians that he is about to "show them a mystery." As the word "mys- "tery" has been treated with no small contempt, I shall embrace this occasion of offering you a short explanation of it, as it is used in the Scriptures. We are allowed to say, that there are mysteries in nature, and perhaps we may be allowed to speak of mysteries in

Providence; but, though an apostle assures us, that "great is the mystery of godliness*," many persons will scarcely bear the application of the word to religion. And a late ingenious writer who has many admirers in the present day, has ventured to affirm, in print, that where mystery begins, religion ends. If the frequency of the case did not, in some degree, abate our wonder, *this* might seem almost a mystery, that any persons who profess to believe the Scripture, should so openly and flatly contradict what the Scripture expressly and repeatedly declares: or that while, as men of reason and philosophy, they are forced to acknowledge a mystery in every part of creation, and must confess it beyond their ability to explain the growth of a blade of grass; they should, in opposition to all the rules of analogy, conclude, that the Gospel, the most important concern of man, and which is commended to us as the most eminent display of the wisdom and power of God, is the only subject so level to our apprehensions, as to be obvious, at first sight, to the most careless and superficial observers. That great numbers of people are very far from being accurate and diligent in their religious inquiries, is too evident to be denied. How often do we meet with persons of sense who talk with propriety on philosophical, political, or commercial subjects, and yet when they speak of religion, discover such gross ignorance, as would be shameful in a child of ten years old, and amounts to a full proof that they have not thought it worth their while to acquire even a slight knowledge of its first principles. Can we even conceive the possibility of a divine revelation that

* 1 Tim. iii. 16.

should have nothing in it mysterious to persons of this character?

A *mystery*, according to the notation of the Greek word, signifies a secret. And all the peculiar truths of the Gospel may justly be styled mysteries or secrets, for two reasons.

1. Because the discovery of them is beyond the reach of fallen man, and they neither would nor could have been known without a revelation from God. This is eminently true of the resurrection. The light of nature, which we often hear so highly commended, may afford some faint glimmerings of a future state, but gives no intimation of a resurrection. The men of wisdom at Athens, the Stoic and Epicurean philosophers, who differed widely in most parts of their respective schemes, united in deriding this sentiment, and contemptuously styled the apostle Paul a babbler for preaching it*. But this secret is to us made known. And we are assured, not only that the Lord will receive to himself the departing spirits of his people, but that he will give commandment concerning their dust, and in due time, raise their vile bodies to a conformity with his own glorious body.

2. Because, though they are revealed expressly in the Scripture, such is the grossness of our conceptions, and the strength of our prejudices, that the truths of revelation are still unintelligible to us, without a further revelation of their true sense to the mind, by the influence of his Holy Spirit. Otherwise, how can the secret of the Lord be restrained to those who fear him†, when the book which contains it is open to all, and the

* Acts xvii. 18. † Psal. xxv. 14.

literal and grammatical meaning of the words is in the possession of many who fear him not?

Books in the arts and sciences, may be said to be full of mysteries to those who have not a suitable capacity and taste for them; or who do not apply themselves to study them with diligence, and patiently submit to learn gradually one thing after another. If you put a treatise on the mathematics, or a system of music, into the hands of a ploughman or labourer, you will not be surprised to find that he cannot understand a single page. Shall the works of a sir Isaac Newton, or of a Handel, be thus inexplicable to one person, while another peruses them with admiration and delight? Shall these require a certain turn of mind, and a close attention; and can it be reasonably supposed, that the Bible is the only book that requires no peculiar disposition, or degree of application, to be understood, though it is designed to make us acquainted with the "deep things of God*?" In one respect, indeed, there is an encouraging difference. Divine truths lie thus far equally open to all, that though none can learn them unless they are taught of God, yet all who are sensible of their own weakness may expect his teaching, if they humbly seek it by prayer. Many people are, perhaps, incapable of being mathematicians. They have not a genius for the science. But there is none teacheth like God. He can give not only light, but sight; not only lessons, but the capacity necessary for their reception. And, while his mysteries are hidden from the wise and prudent, who are too proud to wait upon him for instruction, he reveals them unto babes.

It may perhaps be thought, that a belief of the doc-

* 1 Cor. ii. 10.

trine of the resurrection does not require the same teaching of the Holy Spirit that is necessary to the right knowledge of some other doctrines of the Gospel. But such a belief as may affect, cheer, and animate the heart, must be given us from above, for we cannot reason ourselves into it. Nay, this divine teaching is necessary to secure the mind from the vain reasonings, perplexities, and imaginations, which will bewilder our thoughts upon the subject, unless we learn to yield, in simplicity of faith, to what the Scripture has plainly revealed, and can be content to know no further before the proper time.

II. What we are here taught to expect is thus expressed—"We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be "changed." We are not to suppose that the whole human race will die, and fail from the earth, before the resurrection. Some will be living at the time, and among them some of the Lord's people. Of the living, it cannot properly be said that they will be raised from the dead; but they will experience a change, which will put them exactly in the same state with the others. Their mortality shall be swallowed up in life. Thus we conceive it to have been with Enoch and Elijah. They did not die like other men; but their mortal natures were frail and sinful, like ours, and incapable of sustaining the glories of heaven without a preparation. Flesh and blood, in its present state, cannot inherit the kingdom of God, neither can corruption inherit incorruption; but the dead shall arise, and the living shall be changed. Here is a wide field for speculation, but I mean not to enter it. Curiosity would be glad to know how our bodies, when changed, shall still be the same. Let us first determine how that body, which was once *an infant,* is the very same when it becomes a full

grown man, or a man in extreme old age. Let us explain the transmutation of a caterpillar or silkworm, which, from a reptile, becomes a butterfly. What a wonderful change is this, both in appearance and in powers! Who would suppose it to be the same creature? Yet who can deny it? It is safest and most comfortable for us, to refer to the wisdom and power of God the accomplishment of his own word.

III. These great events will take place unexpectedly and suddenly: "In a moment, in the twinkling of an "eye." We have reason to believe, that a part at least of mankind will be employed as they are now, and as they were in the days of Noah and Lot*, eating, drinking, buying, selling, building, and planting; having nothing less in their thoughts than the calamity and destruction which shall overwhelm them without warning. For, while they are promising themselves peace, the day of the Lord shall come upon them, like a thief in the night, unlooked for, and, like the pangs of a labouring woman, unavoidable. "In that day the lofty looks of man shall "be humbled, and the haughtiness of man shall be "bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted†." So large a part of divine prophecy remains yet to be fulfilled, that I apprehend it is not probable that any of us shall be alive when this great and terrible day of the Lord shall be revealed. But are not some of us exposed to a similar dreadful surprise? If you die in your sins, the consequences will be no less deplorable to you, than if you saw the whole frame of nature perishing with you. Alas! what will you do, whither will you flee for help, or where will you leave your glory, if, while you are engrossed by the cares or pleasures of this world, death

* Luke xvii. 26—30. † Isa. ii. 11.

should arrest you, and summon you to judgment? The rich man in the Gospel is not charged with any crimes of peculiar enormity. It is not said that he ground the faces of the poor, or that he, by fraud or oppression, kept back the hire of the labourers who had reaped his harvest: he only rejoiced in his wealth, and in having much goods laid up for many years, and that therefore he might securely eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, "Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be "required of thee*." Awful disappointment! Thus will it be, sooner or later, with all whose hearts and portions are in this world, but are not rich towards God! Consider this, you that are like-minded with him. Tremble at the thought of being found in the number of those who have all their consolation here, and who, when they die, must leave their all behind them. Now is the acceptable time, the day of salvation. Now, if you will seek the Lord, he will be found of you. Now, if you pray for grace and faith he will answer you. But "when once the Master of the house "shall arise, and" with his own sovereign authoritative hand shall "shut the door" of his mercy, it will then be in vain, and too late, to say, "Lord, Lord, open "unto us†!"

IV. The great scene will be introduced by a signal: "At the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound." Thus the approach of a king or a judge is usually announced; and the Scripture frequently borrows images from our little affairs and customs, and, in condescension to our weakness, illustrates things in themselves too great for our conceptions, by comparing them with those which are more familiar to us.

* Luke xii. 20. † Luke xiii. 25.

It will indeed be comparing great things with small, if I attempt to illustrate this sublime idea by local customs which obtain in this kingdom. At a time of assize, when the judges, to whom the administration and guardianship of our laws are intrusted, are making their entrance, expectation is awake, and a kind of reverence and awe is felt, even by those who are not immediately concerned in their inquest. The dignity of their office, the purpose for which they come, the concourse of people, the order of the procession, and the sound of the trumpet, all concur in raising an emotion in the hearts of the spectators. Happy are they then upon whom the inflexible law has no demand! But who can describe the terror with which the sound of the trumpet is heard by the unhappy criminal; and the throbbings of his heart, if he be already convicted in his own conscience, and knows or fears that there is sufficient evidence at hand to fix the fact upon him, and to prove his guilt? For soon the judge will take his seat, the books will be opened, the cause tried, and the criminal sentenced. Many circumstances of this kind are alluded to in the Scripture, to assist us in forming some conception of what will take place, when all the race of Adam, small and great, shall stand before the Sovereign Judge, the one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. But the concourse, the solemnity, the scrutiny, the event, in the most weighty causes that can come before a human judicature, are mere shadows, and trivial as the sports of children, if compared with the business of this tremendous tribunal. "The Lord "himself will descend, with the voice of the archangel, "and the trump of God." What a trumpet will that be, whose sound shall dissolve the frame of nature, and awaken the dead? When the Lord is seated upon his

great "white throne*," the heavens and the earth shall flee from his presence; but the whole race of mankind shall be assembled before him, each one to give an account of himself, to him from whose penetrating knowledge no secret can be hidden, and from whose unerring, inflexible sentence, there can be no appeal. "Where "then shall the wicked and the ungodly appear?"

But it will be a joyful day to believers. They shall be separated as the wheat from the tares, and arranged at his right hand. When the Lord shall come, attended by his holy angels, his redeemed people will reassume their bodies, refined and freed from all that was corruptible; and those of them who shall be then living will be changed, and caught up to meet him in the air. He will then own them, approve and crown them before assembled worlds. Every charge that can be brought against them will be over-ruled, and their plea, that they trusted in him for salvation, be admitted and ratified. They will be accepted and justified. They will shine like the sun in his train, and attend, as assessors with him, when he shall pass final judgment upon his and their enemies. Then he will be admired in and by them that believe. Their tears will be for ever wiped away, when he shall say to them, "Come, "ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepar- "ed for you from the foundation of the world†."

Beloved, if these things are so, "what manner of "persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and "godliness‡?" Should we not "give all diligence to "make our calling and election sure," that we may be found of him in peace? He who will then be seated upon the throne of judgment, is to us made known as

* Rev. xx. 11. † Matth. xxv. 34. ‡ 2 Pet. iii. 11.

seated upon a throne of grace. It is time, it is high time, and blessed be God, it is not yet too late, to seek his mercy. Still the Gospel invites us to hear his voice, and to humble ourselves before him. Once more you are invited, some of you perhaps, for the last time; how know you but sickness or death may be at the very door? Consider, Are you prepared? Examine the foundation of your hope—and do it quickly, impartially, and earnestly, lest you should be cut off in an hour when you are not aware, and perish with a lie in your right hand.

SERMON XLIII.

DEATH SWALLOWED UP IN VICTORY.

1 CORINTHIANS XV. 54.

Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory!

DEATH, simply considered, is no more than a privative idea, signifying a cessation of life; or, that what was once living, lives no longer. But it has been the general, perhaps the universal custom of mankind, to personify it. Imagination gives death a formidable appearance, arms it with a dart, sting, or scythe, and represents it as an active, inexorable, and invincible reality. In this view death is a great devourer; with his iron tongue he calls for thousands at a meal. He has already swallowed up all the preceding generations of men; all who are now living are marked as his inevitable prey; he is still unsatisfied, and will go on devour-

ing till the Lord shall come. Then this destroyer shall be destroyed; he shall swallow no more, but be swallowed up himself in victory. Thus the Scripture accommodates itself to the language and apprehensions of mortals. Further, the metaphorical usage of the word "swallow" still enlarges and aggrandizes the idea. Thus the earth is said to "have opened her "mouth and swallowed up Korah" and his accomplices*. And thus a pebble, a millstone, or a mountain, if cast into the ocean, would be swallowed up, irrecoverably lost and gone, as though they had never been†. Such shall be the triumphant victory of MESSIAH in the great day of the consummation of all things. Death, in its cause and in its effects, shall be utterly destroyed. Man was created upright, and lived in a paradise, till, by sin, he brought death into the world. From that time death has reigned by sin, and evils abound. But MESSIAH came to make an end of sin, to destroy death, and him that hath the power of it, to repair every disorder, and to remove every misery; and he will so fully, so gloriously accomplish his great undertaking in the final issue, that every thing contrary to holiness and happiness shall be swallowed up and buried beyond the possibility of a return, as a stone that is sunk in the depths of the sea. Thus "where "sin has abounded, grace will much more abound."

This victory, however, being the Redeemer's work, and the fruit of his mediation, the Scripture teaches us to restrain the benefits of it to the subjects of his church and kingdom. "In Adam all die." A depraved nature, guilt, sorrow, and death, extend to all his posterity. The "All," who "in Christ shall be made alive,"

* Numb. xvi. 32. † Rev. xviii. 21.

are those who, by faith in him, are delivered from the sting of death, which is sin, and are made partakers of a new nature. There is a "second death," which, though it shall not hurt the believers in Jesus*, will finally swallow up the impenitent and ungodly. We live in an age when there is, if I may so speak, a resurrection of many old and exploded errors, which, though they have been often refuted and forgotten, are admired and embraced by some persons as new and wonderful discoveries. Of this stamp, is the conceit of a universal restitution to a state of happiness of all intelligent creatures, whether angels or men, who have rebelled against the will and government of God. This sentiment contradicts the current doctrine of Scripture, which asserts the everlasting misery of the finally impenitent, in as strong terms, in the very same terms, as the eternal happiness of the righteous, and sometimes in the very same verse†. Nor can it possibly be true, if our Lord spake the truth concerning Judas, when he said, "It had been good for that man if he "had never been born‡." If I could consider this notion as harmless, though useless, and no worse than many mistakes which men of upright minds have made, through inattention and weakness of judgment, I should not have mentioned it. But I judge it to be little less pernicious and poisonous than false. It directly tends to abate that sense of the evil of sin, of the inflexible justice of God, and the truth of his threatenings, which is but too weak in the best of men. Let us abide by the plain declarations of his word, which assures us, that "there remaineth no other sacrifice

* Rev. ii. 11. † Matth. xxv. 46. ‡ Matth. xxvi. 24.

"for sin*," no future relief against it, for those who now refuse the Gospel; and that they who cordially receive it shall be saved with an everlasting salvation, and shall one day sing, "Death is swallowed up in "victory."

I would further observe, that many prophecies have a gradual and increasing accomplishment, and may be applied to several periods; though their full completion will only be at the resurrection and last judgment. This passage, as it stands in the prophecy of Isaiah†, from whence the apostle quotes it, appears to have a reference to the comparatively brighter light and glory of the Gospel state, beyond what was enjoyed by the church under the Levitical dispensation; and especially to the privileges of those happy days, when "the ful-"ness of the Gentiles and the remnant of Israel shall "be brought in, and the kingdoms of the world shall "become the kingdoms of the Lord and his Christ." I would not exclude these subordinate senses; I have already considered them. But my text calls our attention to the end of all things. Then, in the most emphatical sense, "Death will be swallowed up in "victory."

Let us endeavour to realize the great scene before us, to contemplate the redeemed of the Lord when they shall return with him to animate their glorified bodies. Let us ask the question which the elder proposed to John, "Who are these clothed with white robes, and "whence came they‡?" "They came out of great "tribulation;" they were once under the power of death, but now death, as to them, is swallowed up in

* Heb. x. 26, 27. † Isa. xxv. 8. ‡ Rev. vii. 13.

victory. In every sense in which death ruled over them, they are now completely delivered.

I. They were once dead in law. They had revolted from their Maker. They had violated the holy order of his government, and stood exposed to his righteous displeasure, and to the heavy penalty annexed to the transgression of his commandments. But mercy interposed. "God so loved them, that he gave his only "begotten Son" to make an atonement for their sins, and to be their "wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, "and redemption*." They received grace to believe in this Saviour, and now they are delivered from condemnation. They are "accepted in the Beloved." They are considered as one with him, and interested in all that he did, and in all that he suffered. Now they are the children of God, and heirs of his kingdom. "Though they were afar off, they are brought nigh," admitted into a nearer relation than the holy angels to him who sitteth upon the throne. For he took upon him, and still is pleased to wear, not the nature of angels, but the human nature. Their former guilt is cancelled, blotted out, and swallowed up. All their sins are covered, sunk in his precious blood as in a deep sea, so that, even if sought for, they can no more be found. That they have sinned, will always be a truth; and probably they will never lose a consciousness of what they were by nature and practice while in this world. But this, so far from abating their joy, will heighten their gratitude and praise "to him who loved "them, and washed them from their sins in his own "blood†." Their happiness principally consists in a perception of his love to them, and in their returns of

* 1 Cor. i. 30. † Rev. i. 5.

grateful love to him. "And they love him much," because, for his sake, "much has been forgiven them*."

II. Once they were dead in sin. They were destitute of the knowledge and love of God. "They were "foolish, deceived, and disobedient, enslaved to divers "lusts†," to inordinate, sensual, unsatisfying pleasures; "they lived in malice and envy, they were hateful, and "they hated one another." In a word, "they were "dead while they lived‡." But by the power of grace they were awakened and raised from this death, and made partakers of a new, a spiritual, and divine life. Yet the principle of sin and death still remained in them; and their life upon earth, though a life of faith in the Son of God, was a state of continual warfare. They had many a conflict, and were often greatly distressed. "They sowed in tears," to the end of their pilgrimage, "but now they reap in joy§." This "death "is" also "swallowed up in victory." They are now entirely and for ever freed from every clog, defect, and defilement. By beholding their Lord as he is, in all his glory and love, without any interposing veil or cloud, they are made like him, and, to the utmost measure of their capacity, conformed to his image. Now they are absolutely spotless and impeccable; for though mutability seems no less essential to a creature than dependence, yet they cannot change, because their Lord is unchangeable, for "their life is hidden with Christ "in God||." They cannot fall from their holiness or happiness, because he has engaged to uphold and maintain them by his almighty power.

III. One branch of the death due to sin is the ty-

* Luke vii. 47. † Titus iii. 3. ‡ 1 Tim. v. 6.
§ Psal. cxxvi. 5. || Col. iii. 3.

ranny and power of Satan. For a time he ruled in their hearts, as in his own strong hold; and while they were blinded by his influence, they were little affected with their bondage. Hard as his service was, they did not often complain of it. They were led by him according to his will, for the most part without resistance, or, if they attempted to resist, they found it was in vain. But in his own hour their Lord, who had bought them, dispossessed their strong enemy, and claimed their hearts for himself. Yet, after they were thus set free from his ruling power, this adversary was always plotting and fighting against them. How much have some of them suffered from his subtle wiles and his fiery darts! from his rage as a roaring lion, from his cunning as a serpent lying in their path, and from his attempts to deceive them under the semblance of an angel of light*! But now they are placed out of his reach. Death and Satan are swallowed up. The victory is complete. The wicked one shall never have access to touch or disturb them any more. Now he is shut up in his own place, and the door sealed, no more to open. While he was permitted to vex and worry them, he acted under a limited commission, which he could not exceed; all was directed and over-ruled by the wisdom and love of their Lord for their advantage. Such exercises were necessary then, to discover to them more of the weakness and vileness of their own hearts, to make them more sensible of their dependence upon their Saviour, and to afford them affecting proofs of his power and care engaged in their behalf. But they are necessary no longer. Their warfare is finished. They

* 2 Cor. xi. 14.

are now where the wicked cease from troubling, and where the weary are at rest *.

IV. While they were in the world, they had a share, many of them a very large share, of the woes and sufferings incident to this mortal state; which, as they are the fruits and effects of sin, and greatly contribute to shorten the life of man, and hasten his return to dust, are, as I formerly observed, properly included in the comprehensive meaning of the original sentence, "death." They belong to its train, and are harbingers of its approach. None of the race of Adam are exempted from these; but especially the servants of God have no exemption. Their gracious Lord, who frees them from condemnation, and gives them peace in himself, assures them that in this world they shall have tribulation †. This is so inseparable from their calling, that it is mentioned as one special mark of their adoption and sonship ‡. If the prosperity of the wicked sometimes continues for a season without interruption, "their day is coming §;" but the righteous may expect chastisement and discipline daily. Thus their graces are refined, strengthened, and displayed, to the praise of their heavenly Father. There is no promise in the Bible that secures the most eminent and exemplary believer from participating in the heaviest calamities in common with others, and they have many trials peculiar to themselves. Thus, while upon earth, they endure hardship for his sake. Because he chose them out of the world, and they would no longer comply with its sinful maxims and customs, "the world

* Job iii. 17.
† John xvi. 33.
‡ Heb. xii. 6—8.
§ Psal. xxxvii. 13.

"hated them*." Many of them were the mark of public scorn and malice, accounted the off-scouring of all things; they were driven to deserts, and mountains, and caves; they suffered stripes, imprisonment, and death. Others had trials of pains, sickness, and poverty, of sharp bereaving dispensations. Their gourds withered; and the desire of their eyes was taken away with a stroke. They had fightings without, and fears within. So that if their pressures and troubles were considered, without taking into the account their inward supports, and the consolation they derived from their hopes beyond the grave, they might be deemed "of "all men the most miserable†." But they were supported under these exercises, brought safely through them, and now their sorrows are swallowed up in victory. "Now the days of their mourning are "ended‡." They now confess, that their longest afflictions were momentary, and their heaviest burdens were light, in comparison of that far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory§ which they have entered upon. Sorrow and sighing have taken their everlasting flight, and joy and gladness have come forth to meet them, and to dwell with them for ever‖.

V. In their collective capacity, the seeds of sin often produced bitter fruits. Through remaining ignorance and prejudice, they often mistook and misunderstood one another. They lost much good which they might otherwise have enjoyed, and brought upon themselves many evils, through their intemperate heats and unsanctified zeal, which divided them into little parties and separate interests. The children of the same fa-

* John xv. 19. † 1 Cor. xv. 19. ‡ Isa. lx. 20.
§ 2 Cor. iv. 11. ‖ Isa. li. 11.

mily, the members of the same body, were too often at variance, or at least cold and distant in their regards to each other. Yea, Satan could foment discord and jealousies among those who lived in the same house, or met at the same table of the Lord. But now grace has triumphed over every evil; sin and death are swallowed up in victory. Now all is harmony, love, and joy. They have one heart and one song, which will never more be blemished by the harshness of a single discordant note.

May this prospect animate our hopes, and awaken, in those who have hitherto been afar off, a desire of sharing in the happiness of the redeemed! Awful will be the contrast to those who have had their portion in this world! Is it needful to address any in this auditory, in the language which our Lord used to his impenitent hearers? "Wo unto you that are rich; for ye "have received your consolation. Wo unto you that "are full; for ye shall hunger. Wo unto you that "laugh now; for ye shall mourn and weep*!" When the rich man, who had lived in honour and affluence here, was torn from all that he loved, and lifted up his eyes in torment; the remembrance of his former state, that he once had his good things†, but that they were gone, for ever gone, could only be a keen aggravation of his misery. Dreadful will be the condition of all who die in their sins; but the case of those who are now frequently envied by the ignorant, in the view of a mind enlightened by the truth, must appear doubly and peculiarly pitiable. They have the most to lose, they have the most to account for. Alas, how terrible, how sudden the change! From a state of honour and in-

* Luke vi. 24, 25. † Luke xvi. 25.

fluence amongst men, to fall in a moment under the contempt and displeasure of the Holy God,—to pass, from a crowd of dependants and flatterers, to the company of Satan and his angels; from grandeur and opulence, to a state of utter darkness and horror, where the worm dieth not, and the fire cannot be quenched *. These are sensible images, it is true; the things of the unseen world cannot be described to us as they are in themselves; but we may be certain that the description falls unspeakably short of the reality. The malicious insults of the powers of darkness, the mutual recriminations of those who, having been connected in sin here, will be some way connected in misery hereafter †,—remorse, rage, despair, a total and final exclusion from God, the fountain of happiness, with an abiding sense of his indignation:—this complicated misery cannot be expressed in the language of mortals,—like the joy of the blessed, it is more than eye hath seen, or ear hath heard, or can possibly enter into the heart of man to conceive ‡. Add the ideas of *unchangeable* and *eternal* to the rest, that it will be a misery admitting of no intermission, abatement, or end; and then seriously consider, what can it profit a man, should he gain the whole world, if at last he should thus lose his soul §? No longer make a mock at sin; it is not a small evil; it is a great evil in itself, and, unless pardoned and forsaken, will be productive of tremendous consequences. No longer make light of the Gospel; it points out to you the only possible method of escaping the damnation of hell. To refuse it, is to rush upon remediless destruction. No longer trust in uncertain riches; if you

* Mark ix. 44. 46. 48.
† Matth. xiii. 30.
‡ 1 Cor. ii. 9.
§ Matth. xvi. 26.

possess them, I need not tell you they do not make you happy at present, much less will they comfort you in the hour of death, or profit you in the day of wrath*. Waste not your time and talents, (which must be accounted for,) in the pursuit of sensual pleasure; in the end it will bite like a serpent. For all these things God will assuredly bring you into judgment, unless in this day of grace you humble yourselves to implore that mercy which is still proposed to you, if you will seek it sincerely and with your whole heart; and which I once more entreat, charge, and adjure you to seek, by the great name of MESSIAH, the Saviour, by his agonies and bloody sweat, by his cross and passion, by his precious death, and by the consideration of his future glorious appearance, to subdue all things to himself.

SERMON XLIV.

TRIUMPH OVER DEATH AND THE GRAVE.

1 CORINTHIANS XV. 55, 56, 57.

O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ.

THE Christian soldier may, with the greatest propriety, be said "to war a good warfare†." He is engaged in a good cause; he fights under the eye of the Captain of his salvation. Though he be weak in himself, and though

* Prov. xi. 4. † 1 Tim. i. 18.

his enemies are many and mighty, he may do that which in other soldiers would be presumption, and has often been the cause of a defeat; he may triumph while he is in the heat of battle, and assure himself of victory before the conflict is actually decided; for the Lord, his great Commander, fights for him, goes before him, and treads his enemies under his feet. Such a persuasion, when solidly grounded upon the promises and engagement of a faithful, unchangeable God, is sufficient, it should seem, to make a coward bold. True Christians are not cowards; yet, when they compare themselves with their adversaries, they see much reason for fear and suspicion on their own parts; but when they look to their Saviour, they are enlightened, strengthened, and comforted. They consider who he is, what he has done; that the battle is not so much theirs as his; that he is their strength and their shield, and that his honour is concerned in the event of the war. Thus out of weakness they are made strong; and however pressed and and opposed, they can say, "Nay, in all these things "we are more than conquerors, through him that loved "us*!" The whole power of the opposition against them is summed up in the words "sin," and "death:" but these enemies are already weakened and disarmed. It is sin that furnished death with his sting: a sting sharpened and strengthened by the law. But Jesus, by his obedience unto death, has made an end of sin, and has so fulfilled and satisfied the law on their behalf, that death is deprived of its sting, and can no longer hurt them. They may therefore meet it with confidence, and say, "Blessed be God, who giveth us the victory through "our Lord Jesus Christ."

* Rom. viii. 37.

We have here two unspeakably different views to take of the same subject: Death armed with its formidable sting; and Death rendered harmless, and its aspect softened, by the removal of the sting.

I. The first is a very awful subject. I entreat your attention. I am not now about to speak upon a point of speculation. It is a personal, a home concern to us all. For we must all die. But should any of you feel, not only the stroke, but the sting of death when you leave this world, it were better for you that you had never been born.

The love of life, and consequently a reluctance to that dissolution of the intimate union between soul and body which we call death, seems natural to man. But if there was no hereafter, no state of judgment and retribution to be expected; if there was no consciousness of guilt, no foreboding of consequences upon the mind; if we only considered death as inevitable, and had no apprehensions beyond it; death would be divested of its principal terrors. We see that when conscience is stupified, or when the mind is poisoned with infidelity, many people, notwithstanding the natural love of life, are so disgusted with its disappointments, that a fit of impatience, or the dread of contempt, often prevail on them to rush upon death by an act of their own will; or to hazard it in a duel, rather than be suspected of wanting what they account spirit. But death has a sting, though they perceive it not till they feel it, till they are stung by it past recovery.

But usually, and where the heart is not quite hardened, men are unwilling and afraid to die. They have some apprehension of the sting. Death can sting at a distance. How often and how greatly does the fear of *death poison* and embitter all the comforts of life, even

in the time of health! Perhaps some of you well know this to be true. But in health people can in some measure run away from themselves, if I may so speak. They fly to business, company, and amusements, to hide themselves from their own reflections. Their fears are transient, occasional, and partial; they would tremble indeed, if they knew all; or if they were steadfastly and deliberately to contemplate what they do know. How sin is the sting of death, is best discovered when conscience is alarmed in a time of sickness; when the things of the world can no longer amuse, and death is approaching with hasty strides. These scenes are mostly kept secret; and very often they are not understood by those who are spectators of them. Perhaps the unhappy, terrified sinner, is considered as delirious, because the sting of death in his conscience extorts from him such confessions and complaints as he never made before. What was once slighted as a fable, is now seen and felt as a reality. Such cases, I am afraid, are more frequent than we are in general aware of. But they are suppressed, ascribed to the violence of the fever, and forgotten as soon as possible. Yet they do sometimes transpire. I believe there is no reason to doubt the truth of what we have heard of one who, in the horrors of despair, vainly offered his physicians many thousand pounds to prolong his life but a single day. The relation is in print of another, who, pointing to the fire in his chamber, said, if he were only to lie twenty thousand years in such a fire, he should esteem it a mercy compared with what he felt, and with what he saw awaiting him. It is not always thus. Many persons die insensible as they lived, and can perhaps trifle and jest in their last moments. But the

Scripture assures us, that when they who die in their sins breathe their last in this world, they open their eyes in the other world in torments. For the sting of death, the desert of sin, unless timely removed by faith in Jesus, will fill the soul with anguish for ever. It derives a strength, an efficacy, and a continuance from the law.

This law, which gives strength to sin, and sharpens the sting of death, is the law of our creation, as connected with the penalty which God has annexed to the breach of it. Our relation to God, as we are his creatures, requires us, according to the very nature of things, supremely to love, serve, trust, and obey him, who made us, and "in whom we live, and move, and have our "being*." And our revolting from him, and living to ourselves in opposition to his will, is such an affront to his wisdom, power, authority, and goodness, as must necessarily involve misery in the very idea of it, if his perfections, the capacity of our souls, and our absolute dependence upon him, be attended to. And they must be attended to, sooner or later. Though he keep long silence, and the sinner presumes upon his patience, "and thinks him such a one as himself," he will at length "reprove him†;" and set his sins in order before him, in contrast with the demands of his law. The nature, authority, extent, and sanction of this law, all combine to give efficacy to the sting of death.

1. The law, to which our tempers and conduct ought to be conformed, is not an arbitrary appointment; but necessarily results from our state as creatures, and the capacities and powers we have received from our Cre-

* Acts xvii. 28. † Psal. l. 21.

ator. It is therefore holy, wise, and good; indispensable, and unchangeable. To love God with all our heart and strength, to depend upon him, to conform to every intimation of his will, was the duty of man from the first moment of his existence; was the law of his nature, written originally in his heart. The publication of it, as it stands in the Bible, by precepts and prohibitions, would not have been necessary, had he continued in that state of rectitude in which he was created. It became necessary, after his fall, to restrain him from evil, and to convince him of sin; but this could not properly increase his primitive obligation to obedience.

2. We are bound to the observance of this law by the highest authority. It is the law of God, our Maker, Preserver, and Benefactor, who has every conceivable right to govern us. His eye is always upon us, and we are surrounded by his power; so that we can neither avoid his notice, nor escape his hand. Men are usually tenacious of their authority; they seldom allow their dependants to dispute or disobey their commands with impunity. It is expected that a son should honour his father, and a servant his master*. And when men have power to execute the dictates of their pride, they frequently punish disobedience with death. But how will these haughty worms, who trample upon their fellow-worms, and think they have a right to the most implicit obedience from their inferiors; how will they tremble when they shall appear before God, who is no respecter of persons, to answer for their contempt of the authority of the sovereign Lawgiver, who, alone, is able to save or to destroy? That "we ought to obey "God rather than man†," will, perhaps be allowed

* Mal. i. 6. † Acts v. 29.

as a speculative truth; but whoever will uniformly make it the rule of his practice, must expect upon many occasions to be deemed a fool or a madman by the world around him. But sovereignty, majesty, authority, and power, belong to God. He is the Governor of the universe, and his throne is established in righteousness. He is long-suffering, and waits to be gracious; but he will not forego his right. Sin is the sting of death indeed, when the authority of him against whom it was committed is perceived by the conscience.

3. The extent of the law adds to the strength by which sin acts as the sting of death. Human laws can only take cognizance of words and actions. But the law of God reaches to the thoughts and inward recesses of the heart. It condemns what is most specious and most approved amongst men, if not proceeding from a right intention, and directed to the right end, which can be no other than the will and glory of him who made us. It condemns the sinner, not only for the evil which he has actually committed, but for every sinful purpose formed in his heart, and which was only rendered abortive for want of opportunity*. It likewise takes exact notice of every aggravation of sin, arising from circumstances, from the abuse of superior light and advantages, and from the long train of consequences, increasing in proportion to the influence which the rank, wealth, or extensive connexions of the offender give to his example.

4. The sanction of the law, which thus strengthens the malignity of sin, is the very *point*, if I may so express myself, of the "sting" of death. This is the

* Matth. v. 28.

displeasure of the Almighty. His holy, inflexible love of order will exclude those who violate it from his favour. They must be miserable, unless they are reconciled and renewed by the grace of the Gospel. They must be separated from him, and they cannot be happy without him. They are not so even in this world, which they love. How miserable then must they be, when torn from all their attachments, pleasures, and possessions; having no longer any thing to divert them from a fixed attention to their true state, they shall be made keenly sensible of what is implied in that sentence, "Depart "from me, ye accursed, into devouring fire." We cannot now conceive what it will be to lose the only good which can satisfy a soul: to be shut out from God, whose favour is life, and in whose presence there is fulness of joy, and to be shut up where neither peace nor hope can enter. The images of fire unquenchable, and a never-dying worm, are but faint emblems of that despair and remorse which will sting the sinful soul in a future state. This is the second death: this is eternal death; for the wicked, and all they who forget God, when thrust into hell, will for ever desire to die, and death will for ever flee from them*.

II. Let us turn our thoughts to a more pleasing theme, and attempt to take a view of death as softened into a privilege by him who has brought life and immortality to light. Jesus died. His death was penal; he died for sin, though not for his own, and therefore suffered the penalty due to sin, the curse of the broken law. The torment and shame of his crucifixion were preceded and accompanied by unknown agonies and conflicts, which caused him to sweat blood, and to utter

* Rev. ix. 6.

strong cries and groans. Death stung him to the heart; but, (as it is said of the enraged bee,) he lost his sting. The law having been honoured, and sin expiated, by the obedience and sufferings of the Son of God for us, and in our nature, death has no longer power to sting those who believe in him. They do not properly "die," they "fall asleep*" in Jesus. To them this last enemy acts a friendly part. He is sent to put an end to all their sorrows, and to introduce them into a state of endless life and joy.

1. Dying believers can sing this song before their departure out of the world. We expect it, when we are called to attend them in their last hours; and if their illness leaves them in possession of their faculties and speech, we are seldom disappointed. Yet I believe a full knowledge of this subject cannot be collected from what we observe of others, or hear from them, when they are near death. We must be in similar circumstances ourselves, before we can see as they see, or possess the ideas which they endeavour to describe, and which seem too great for the language of mortals to convey.

We know, by the evidence of undeniable testimony, that many faithful servants of God, when called to suffer for his sake, have not only been supported, but comforted, and enabled to rejoice, under the severest tortures, and even in the midst of the flames. We suppose, I think with reason, that such communications of light and power as raise a person, in such situations, above the ordinary feelings of humanity, must, either in kind or degree, be superior to what is usually enjoyed by Christians in the smoother walks of prosperity and

* Acts vii. 60. 1 Thess. iv. 15.

outward peace. God, who is all-sufficient, and always near, has promised to give his people strength according to their day, and in the time of trouble they are not disappointed. A measure of the like extraordinary discoveries and supports is often vouchsafed to dying believers, and thus the gloom, which might otherwise hang over their dying hours, is dispelled; and while they contemplate the approach of death, a new world opens upon them. Even while they are yet upon earth, they stand upon the threshold of heaven. It seems, in many cases, as if the weakness of the bodily frame gave occasion to the awakening of some faculty, till then dormant in the soul, by which invisibles are not only believed, but seen, and unutterables are heard and understood:—

> The soul's dark cottage, batter'd and decay'd,
> Lets in new light through chinks——

Instances are frequent of those who are thus blessed when they die in the Lord; and it does not appear that old age, or great knowledge, or long experience, give any considerable advantage in a dying hour; for when the heart is truly humbled for sin, and the hope solidly fixed upon the Saviour, persons of weak capacities and small attainments, yea, novices and children, are enabled to meet death with equal fortitude and triumph. And often the present comforts they feel, and their lively expectations of approaching glory, inspire them with a dignity of sentiment and expression far beyond what could be expected from them; and perhaps their deportment, upon the whole, is no less animating and encouraging, than that of the most established and best informed believers. Thus, "out of the "mouths of babes and sucklings," the Lord "ordains

"strength, and perfects his praise*." In a few hours, under the influence of his immediate teaching, they often learn more of the certainty and importance of divine things, than can be derived from the ordinary methods of instruction in the course of many years. In the midst of agonies and outward distress, we hear them with admiration declare that they are truly happy, and that they never knew pleasure in their happiest days of health equal to what they enjoy when flesh and heart are fainting. For death has lost its sting as to them, and while they are able to speak, they continue ascribing praise to him "who has "given them the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ." Every word in this doxology is emphatical.

First, "Thanks be to God." This blessedness is all his work. The means are of his gracious appointment. The application is by his gracious power. He gave his Son for them; he sent his Gospel to them. It was the agency of his Spirit that made them a willing people. The word of promise, which is the ground of their hope, was of his gratuitous providing; and it was he who constrained and enabled them to trust in it†.

Secondly, "Who giveth us the victory." This is victory indeed; for it is over the last enemy; and after the last enemy is vanquished, there can be no more conflicts. In this sense, believers are more than conquerors. In other wars, they who have conquered once and again, may have been finally defeated, or they may have died, (like our long-lamented general Wolfe,) upon the field of battle, and have left the fruits of their victory to be enjoyed by others. But the Christian soldier, though he may occasionally be a loser in a skirmish, is sure to conquer in the last great, deciding

* Psal. viii. 2. † Psal. cxix. 49.

battle; and when, to an eye of sense, he seems to fall, he is instantly translated to receive the plaudit of his commander, and the crown of life which he has prepared for them that love him.

Thirdly, This victory is "through our Lord Jesus "Christ." They "gained it not by their own sword, "neither was it their own arm that saved them*." He died to deliver them, who would otherwise, through fear of death, have been always subject to bondage. And it is he who teaches their hands to war, and their fingers to fight, and covers their heads in the day of battle. Therefore they gladly say, "Not unto us, O "Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name, be the glory "and the praise†." And this consideration enhances their pleasure; for, because they love him above all, they rejoice not only in the victory they obtain, but in the thought that they are indebted to him for it. For were it possible there could be several methods of salvation, and they were left to their own choice, they would, most gladly and deliberately, choose that method which should bring them under the greatest obligations to him.

2. This triumphant song will be sung to the highest advantage, when the whole body of the redeemed shall be collected together to sing it with one heart and voice at the great resurrection-day. Lot was undoubtedly thankful, when he was snatched from the impending destruction of Sodom. Yet his lingering‡ showed, that he had but an imperfect sense of the greatness of the mercy afforded him. His feelings were probably stronger afterwards, when he stood in safety upon the mountain, and actually saw the smoke rising, like the smoke of a

* Psal. xliv. 3. † Psal. cxv. 1. ‡ Gen. xix. 16.

furnace, from the place where he had lately dwelt. At present, we have very faint ideas of the misery from which we are delivered, of the happiness reserved in heaven for us, or of the sufferings of the Redeemer; but if we attain to the heavenly Zion, and see from thence the smoke of that bottomless pit, which might justly have been our everlasting abode, we shall then more fully understand what we are delivered from, the means of our deliverance, and the riches of "the in-"heritance of the saints in light." And then we shall sing in more exalted strains than we can at present even conceive of, "Thanks be to God who hath given "us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ."

SERMON XLV.

DIVINE SUPPORT AND PROTECTION.

ROMANS viii. 31.

[*What shall we then say to these things?*] *If God be for us, who can be against us?*

THE passions of joy or grief, of admiration or gratitude, are moderate, when we are able to find words which fully describe their emotions. When they rise very high, language is too faint to express them; and the person is either lost in silence, or feels something which after his most laboured efforts, is too big for utterance. We way often observe the apostle Paul under this difficulty, when attempting to excite in others such sensations as filled his own heart, while contemplating *the glories* and blessings of the Gospel. Little verbal

critics, who are not animated by his fervour, are incapable of entering into the spirit of his writings. They coldly examine them by the strictness of grammatical rules, and think themselves warranted to charge him with solecisms and improprieties of speech. For it must be allowed, that he sometimes departs from the usual forms of expression; invents new words, or at least compounds words for his own use, and heaps one hyperbole upon another. But there is a beautiful energy in his manner, far superior to the frigid exactness of grammarians, though the taste of a mere grammarian is unable to admire or relish it. When he is stating the advantage of being with Christ, as beyond any thing that can be enjoyed in the present life, he is not content with saying, as his expression is rendered in our version, "it is far better*." In the Greek, another word of comparison is added, which, if our language would bear the literal translation, would be, *Far more better*, or *Much more better*. And when he would describe the low opinion he had of himself, great as his attainments were in our view, he thinks it not sufficient to style himself "The least of all saints," but "less "than the least†." Such phrases do not imply that he was ignorant of the rules of good writing, but they strongly intimate the fulness of his heart. In the course of the chapter before us, having taken a rapid survey of the work of grace, carried on by successive steps in the hearts of believers, till at length consummated in glory; in this verse, instead of studying for words answerable to his views, he seems to come to a full stop, as sensible that the strongest expressions he could use would be too faint. He makes an abrupt transition from describing

* Phil. i. 23. † Eph. iii. 8.

to admiring. He has said much, but not enough; and therefore sums up all with "What shall we say to "these things?" Surely they who can read, with the utmost coolness and indifference, what he could not write without rapture and astonishment, do not take his words in his sense. If the apostle's phraseology is now become obsolete, and sounds uncouth in the ears of too many who would be thought Christians, is there not too much reason to fear that they are Christians only in name?

Though this short, lively question is omitted in the musical composition, I am not willing to leave it out. It stands well, as the sequel to what we have lately considered. The sting of death is taken away. Death itself is swallowed up in victory. Sinners, who were once burdened with guilt, and exposed to condemnation, obtain a right to sing, "Thanks be to God, who giveth "us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ"— "What shall we say to these things?"

It stands well, likewise, as introducing the following question, "If God be for us;" if his promises, his power, his wisdom, and his love, be all engaged on our behalf, "who can be against us?" What "shall we," or can we, or need we, "say" more than this? What cause can we have for fear, or our enemies for triumph, if God be for us?

We may consider,

I. What is implied in the supposition.

II. The meaning of the inference.

I. The form of the question is hypothetical. If the assumption be right, that God is for us; the conclusion that none can be effectually against us, is infallibly sure. Many serious persons will allow, that if God be *indeed* for them, all must, and will, be well in the end.

But they hesitate at the *if*, and are ready to ask, How shall I know that God is for me? I would offer you a few considerations towards the determining of this point, in the first place.

Sin has made an awful breach and separation between God and mankind. They are alienated in their minds from him, and he is justly displeased with them. The intercourse and communion with God, which constitute the honour and happiness of the human nature, were no longer either afforded or desired when man rebelled against his Maker, except to the few who understood and embraced his gracious purpose of reconciliation; the first intimation of which was revealed in the promise of the "seed of the woman, who should "bruise the serpent's head*." The clear and full discovery of this reconciliation is made known to us by the Gospel: "God was in Christ reconciling the world "unto himself†." God is already reconciled in his sense, that having provided and accepted a satisfaction to his law and justice, he can now, in a way worthy of himself, receive and pardon the returning sinner. And he accompanies the word of his grace with the power of his Holy Spirit, to make sinners willing to be reconciled to him. If we be for God, he is assuredly for us. If we seek him, he has been beforehand with us; for, in the first instance, he is always "found of those who sought him "not‡." If we love him, it is because he first loved us. True believers walk with God. "But two cannot "walk together," with confidence and comfort, "unless "they be agreed§." This agreement is chiefly, with respect to three particulars, proposed by the Lord God in

* Gen. iii. 15. † 2 Cor. v. 19.
‡ Isa. lxv. 1. § Amos iii. 3.

his word, and to which the believing sinner cheerfully and thankfully accedes.

1. In the ground of the agreement; this is MESSIAH, the Mediator between God and man. When he entered upon his office, a voice from heaven commended him to sinners, "This is my beloved Son in whom I "am well pleased*." And they who are enlightened to behold the glory of God in his person and engagement, accept him as the beloved Saviour, in whom and with whom they are well pleased. Without this acceptance of the Mediator there can be no agreement. Jesus is the only door, the only way of a sinner's access to the knowledge and favour of God. This is the precious and sure foundation which he has laid in Zion†; and to presume to build our hope upon any other, is to build upon a quicksand. In this point, reason, in its present distempered state, would lead us, if followed, directly contrary to the simplicity of faith. Reason suggests, that if we have acted wrong we must repent and amend, and what can we do more? But the law against which we have sinned makes no provision for repentance. Nor is such a repentance as includes a change of heart, (and nothing short of this deserves the name,) in our own power. "Repentance unto life‡," is the gift of God; and Jesus, who is exalted "to be a Prince and a Sa-"viour§," bestows it upon those who acknowledge him, and implore it of him. But God will only treat with us as those who are condemned already, who have nothing but sin, and deserve nothing but misery. When we feel this to be our proper state, we are referred to Jesus, in whom God is well pleased, and for whose sake sins are pardoned, and sinners accepted and

* *Matth.* iii. 17. † 1 Pet. ii. 6. ‡ Acts xi. 18. § Ibid. v. 31.

justified, without condition and without exception. And then likewise we begin to see the necessity, propriety, and sufficiency of this appointment. Herein all who are taught of God are of one mind. However they may differ in some respects, they agree in cordially "receiv- "ing Christ Jesus the Lord*," as he is made of God for us, "wisdom, righteousness, and salvation."

2. They agree with God in the great design of the Gospel, which is to purify unto himself a peculiar people, who, being delivered from their fears and their enemies, shall serve him with an unreserved and persevering obedience†. A deliverance from the power of sin and Satan, a devotedness to God, and a conformity to the mind and pattern of his dear Son, are included by every true believer in the idea of salvation. He knows that he can be happy in no other way. This is a turning point. There are convictions of sin excited by a dread of punishment, which, though distressing to the conscience, leave the heart and affections unchanged. They who are thus impressed, if no further, would be satisfied with an assurance of pardon. But "the grace "of God which bringeth salvation‡ teaches us to re- "nounce," to abhor "all ungodliness in the present "world;" to give ourselves unto him "who gave himself "for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity," and "to walk worthy of God, who calls us to his kingdom "and glory§." "This is the will of God, even our "sanctification." And this is the desire of his people, that they may be sanctified wholly; that their whole persons, spirit, soul, and body, may be preserved blameless; that they may be filled with the fruits of righteousness,

* 1 Col. ii. 6.
† Luke i. 74, 75.
‡ Tit. ii. 11, 12.
§ 1 Thess. ii. 12.

which are by Jesus Christ; that they may walk as the sons of God, without rebuke, and shine as lights in the world*. Though their attainments are imperfect, in their judgment and desires, they are fully agreed with God as to their aim and design.

3. They are agreed with him likewise as to the ultimate great end, the final cause of their redemption, which is, "the praise of the glory of his grace†." That the loftiness, high looks, and proud pretences of men may be abased, and the Lord alone may be exalted; "and that he who glorieth may glory only in the "Lord‡." Salvation is of the Lord in every sense; the plan, the price, the power, the application, the consummation. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the author and the object of it. The praise, therefore, is wholly due to him, and he claims it. To this claim his people fully consent. It is the desire of their souls, that his name, which alone is excellent, may alone be extolled; and with one heart and voice they say, "Not "unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thee be all "the glory and all the praise§!"

If we truly understand and approve these things, then we are certainly engaged for God, and of course he is for us. For he alone could either enable us to see them in their true light, or incline our hearts to embrace them. Who then can be against us?

II. We are not to understand the question, "Who "can be against us?" as designed to encourage us to expect that they who have the Lord on their side will meet with no opposition; but that all opposition against them will be in vain.

* Phil. ii. 15. † Eph. i. 6.
‡ 1 Cor. i. 31. § Psal. cxv. 1.

1. They whom God is for, will on that very account have many opposers.

First, The men of the world. This our Lord expressly teaches us to expect: "If ye were of the world, the "world would love its own. But because ye are not "of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, "therefore the world hateth you*." And his apostle, "Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you †." Till we declare for him, the world will bear with us, but no longer: as the Gibeonites were in a state of honour and friendship with the neighbouring cities, till they submitted to Joshua‡; but when they obtained peace from him, they were immediately involved in war with their former friends. While Saul persecuted the church, the world smiled upon him, and he seemed to be, as we say, in the way of preferment. But when he yielded himself to the service of Christ, and his defection from the common cause became generally known, bonds and afflictions awaited him in every place; and they who before had employed and caressed him, sought his life. I do not mean to sound a trumpet of defiance. I believe that young converts, by their warm, but injudicious zeal, often more than is necessary, provoke the spirit of the world, and thereby increase their own difficulties. The Gospel, when rightly understood, inspires a spirit of benevolence, and directs to a conduct which is suited to conciliate good-will and esteem. And when the apostle exhorts us, "If it be "possible, and as much as in us lies, to live peaceably "with all men§," he gives us hope that much may be done to soften prejudices, to put to silence the ignor-

* John xv. 19.
† John iii. 13.
‡ Joshua x. 1—4.
§ Rom. xii. 18.

ance of foolish men, and to make them at least ashamed, by a patient perseverance in well-doing. A consistent Christian, whose integrity, humility, and philanthropy, mark his character and adorn his profession, will in time command respect; but his attachment to unfashionable truths, and his separation from the maxims and pursuits of the many, will render him in their eyes singular and precise, weak and enthusiastic. If they say, "He is a good sort of man, but has some strange "peculiarities," it is the most favourable judgment he can hope for; and from some persons, and at some times, he will meet with tokens of a settled dislike. For, though a religious character may be formed, which even the world will approve, "yet all who will live "godly in Christ Jesus, must suffer persecution*." They walk in the midst of observers, who watch for their halting, who lay snares for their feet, and will endeavour to bribe or intimidate them to forsake the path of duty. It is difficult to stem the torrent, or to avoid the infection of the world: and to live superior to the fear of man, as becomes us, if we know whose we are, and whom we serve. But though difficult, it is practicable and attainable, and actually attained by believers; "for this is the victory that overcometh the world, even "our faith†."

Secondly, The powers of darkness. Satan will not ordinarily trouble while he bears rule. He is indeed an enemy to his own servants, and seeks their destruction, both soul and body, by pushing them on in sin, which, if persisted in, will prove their ruin; but while they make no resistance, he gives them no disturbance. It is otherwise with those whom the Lord has freed from

* 2 Tim. iii. 12. † 1 John v. 4.

his bondage. He will pursue them like a lion seeking his prey*, and lie in wait for them like a serpent in the path. This is one cause of the world's hatred: for the Scripture styles him "the god of this world†," and he sets all that he can influence, tongues, and pens, and swords, against those who are on the Lord's side.—Therefore the people of God may be known by two marks. Satan, by himself and by his instruments, fights against them, and they also fight against him. The former without the latter is not conclusive. A mere outward profession of religion may excite opposition, and mere pretenders may take pleasure in it for a time, if it does not come too close. It may feed their vanity, and give them a sort of consequence, by having sufferings to talk of. But I would entreat my hearers, seriously to examine, Is your heart really set against sin, which is the strength of Satan's kingdom? Are you against his will and interest in the world? Have you renounced his service? If so, fear not. God is for you, and none can harm you. For,

2. No opposition can prevail against us, if God be for us. It is impossible to deny, or even to doubt, this truth, upon the principles of reason: for who, or what, can injure those who are under the protection of Omnipotence? And yet it is not always easy to maintain the persuasion of it in the mind, and to abide in the exercise of faith, when to an eye of sense, all things seem against us. But, though we believe not, he continueth faithful, and will not forsake those whom he once enables to put their trust in him. Job was a faithful and approved servant of God, yet for a season his trials were great, and his confidence was sometimes shaken. But he was supported, and at length delivered.

* 1 *Pet. v. 8.* † 2 Cor. iv. 4.

There are many instances recorded in Scripture to confirm our faith, and to teach us that God manifests himself to be for his people, and in different ways renders them superior to all their difficulties and enemies.

At one time he prevents the threatened danger.—They only see it, or expect it; for he is better to them than their apprehensions and fears. Thus when Sennacherib was furious against Jerusalem, and supposed he could easily prevail, he was not suffered to come near it*. When he thought to destroy it, he felt a hook and a bridle which he could not resist, and was compelled to retire disappointed and ashamed.

At another time the enemies go a step further. His people are brought into trouble, but God is with them, and they escape unhurt. So Daniel, though he was cast into the den of lions†, received no more harm from them, than if he had been among a flock of sheep. He permitted three of his servants to be thrown into a furnace of fire, but he restrained the violence of the flames, so that not even a hair of their heads was singed‡.

The most that opposers can do is to kill the body§. If God permits his people to be thus treated, still they are not forsaken. Their death is precious in his sight ‖. They who die in the Lord are blessed. They are highly honoured who are called and enabled to die for him. If he is pleased to comfort them with his presence, and then to take them home to himself, they can desire no more. Stephen, though apparently given up to the power of his adversaries, and cruelly stoned to death, was no less happy than those who die in composure upon their beds, with their friends around them. Nor was

* Isa. xxxvii. 29. 33. † Dan. vi. 23. ‡ Dan. iii. 27.
§ Luke xii. 4. ‖ Psal. cxvi. 15.

he less composed: for the heavens were opened to him, and he saw his Saviour in glory, approving his fidelity, and ready to receive his spirit*.

In brief, whatever men or devils may attempt against us, there are three things which, if we are true believers, they cannot do. They may be helpful to wean us from the world; they may add earnestness to our prayers; they may press us to greater watchfulness and dependence; they may afford fair occasions of evidencing our sincerity, the goodness of our cause, and the power of that God who is for us,—such are the benefits that the Lord teaches his people to derive from their sufferings, for he will not let them suffer or be oppressed in vain. But no enemy can deprive us of the love with which God favours us, or the grace which he has given us, or the glory which he has prepared for us. "Now what shall "we say to these things?"

Alas! there are too many who say, at least in their hearts, (for their conduct bewrays their secret thoughts,) we care but little about them. If they were to speak out, they might adopt the language of the rebellious Jews to the prophet. "As to the word which thou "hast spoken to us in the name of the Lord, we will "not hearken unto thee; but we will certainly do what-"soever thing goeth forth out of our own mouth†." And there are others who plainly say, Let us then "con-"tinue in sin that grace may abound." They do not so expressly reject the Gospel, as to take encouragement from it to go on in their wickedness. The case of the former is very dangerous, that of the latter is still worse. But grace, though long slighted, though often abused, is once more proclaimed in your hearing. The

* Acts vii. 56—60. † Jerem. xliv. 16, 17.

Lord forbid that you should perish with the sound of salvation in your ears!

At present, and while you persist in your impenitence and unbelief, I may reverse the words of my text. Oh! consider, I beseech you, before it be too late, "If God "be against you, who can be for you?" Will your companions comfort you in a dying hour? Will your riches profit you in the day of wrath? Will the recollection of your sinful pleasures, give you confidence to stand before this great and glorious Lord God, when you shall be summoned to appear at his tribunal? May you be timely wise, and "flee for refuge to the hope "set before you!"

SERMON XLVI.

ACCUSERS CHALLENGED.

ROMANS viii. 33.

Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth.

THOUGH the collating of manuscripts and various readings, has undoubtedly been of use in rectifying some mistakes which, through the inadvertency of transcribers, had crept into different copies of the New Testament; yet such supposed corrections of the text ought to be admitted with caution, and not unless supported by strong reasons and good authorities. The whole Scripture is given by inspiration of God: and they who thankfully receive it as his book, will not trifle with it by substituting bold conjectural alterations, which, though

they may deem them to be amendments, may possibly disguise or alter the genuine sense of the passage. Some fancied emendations might be pointed out, suggested by very learned men, which do not seem to afford so strong a proof of the sound judgment of the proposers, as of their vanity and rashness. Let the learned men be as ingenious as they please in correcting and amending the text of Horace or Virgil, for it is of little importance to us whether their criticisms be well founded or not, but let them treat the pages of divine revelation with reverence.

But the pointing of the New Testament, though it has a considerable influence upon the sense, is of inferior authority. It is a human invention, very helpful, and for the most part, I suppose, well executed. But in some places it may admit of real amendment. The most ancient manuscripts are without points, and some of them are even without a distinction of the words. With the pointing, therefore, we may take more liberty than with the text; though even this liberty should be used soberly. A change in the pointing of this verse and the following, will not alter the received sense, but, as some critics judge, will make it more striking and emphatical. If two clauses should be read with an interrogation instead of a period, the apostle's triumphant challenge may be expressed in the following brief paraphrase :—

"Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's "elect?" Shall God himself? So far from it, it is he "who justifieth. Who is he that condemneth?" Shall "Christ? Nay, he loves them, and accepts them. Shall "he who died for them, yea, rather who is risen again, "is even at the right hand of God," on their behalf, "who also maketh intercession for them?" Then

not the least ground to fear, that he who has promised to justify them will lay any thing to their charge; or that he will condemn them, who died to deliver them from condemnation. Nor can any charge of their enemies prevail to the condemnation of those whom God is pleased to justify, and for whom Christ died, and now intercedes before the throne.

The death, the resurrection, and ascension of MESSIAH, we have already considered, I shall speak only to two points from this verse.

I. The title here given to believers, "God's elect."

II. Their great privilege, they are justified, "It is "God who justifieth" them.

I. The persons who will be finally justified by God are here styled his "elect." Very near and strong is the connexion between peace and truth. Yet a mistaken zeal for truth has produced many controversies, which have hurt the peace of the people of God among themselves; and at the same time have exposed them to the scorn and derision of the world. On the other hand, a pretended or improper regard for peace has often been prejudicial to the truth. But that peace which is procured at the expense of truth, is too dearly purchased. Every branch of doctrine, belonging to the faith once delivered to the saints, is not equally plain to every believer. Some of these doctrines the apostle compares to milk, the proper and necessary food for babes; others to strong meat, adapted to a more advanced state in the spiritual life, when experience is more enlarged, and the judgment more established*. The Lord, the great teacher, leads his children on gradually, from the plainer to the more difficult truths, as

* Heb. v. 13, 14.

they are able to bear them. But human teachers are often too hasty; they do not attend sufficiently to the weakness of young converts, but expect them to learn and receive every thing at once; they are not even content with offering strong meat prematurely to babes, but force upon them the *bones* of subtilties, distinctions, and disputations. But, though a judicious minister will endeavour to accommodate himself to the state of his hearers, no Gospel truth is to be tamely and voluntarily suppressed from a fear of displeasing men. In fact, however, the controversies which have obtained among real Christians, have not so much affected the truth as it lies in the Scripture, as the different explanations, which fallible men of warm passions, and too full of their own sense, have given of it. They who professedly hold and avow the doctrine of an election of grace, are now called Calvinists; and the name is used by some persons as a term of reproach. They would insinuate that Calvin invented the doctrine; or, at least that he borrowed it from Austin, who, according to them, was the first of the fathers that held it. It is enough for me that I find it in the New Testament. But many things advanced upon the subject by later writers, I confess I do not find there. If any persons advance harsh assertions, not warranted by the word of God, I am not bound to defend them. But as the doctrine itself is plainly taught, both by our Lord and his apostles, and is of great importance, when rightly understood, to promote the humiliation, gratitude, and comfort of believers, I think it my duty to state it as plainly as I can. I shall offer my view of it, in a series of propositions so evidently founded, (as I conceive,) on acknowledged principles of Scripture, that they cannot be easily controverted by any persons who have a real reverence for the

word of God, and any due acquaintance with their own hearts.

I. All mankind are sinners* by nature and practice. Their lives are stained with transgressions, their hearts are depraved, their minds blinded, and alienated from God. So that they are not sensible either of their guilt or their misery; nor so much as desirous of returning to God, till he prevents them with his mercy, and begins to draw their hearts towards himself. Were I to prove this at large, I might transcribe one half of the Bible. Nay, it is fully proved by experience and observation. The Heathens felt and confessed it. My present subject does not require me to account for it, or to reason upon it. That it is so, I appeal to fact.

II. The inestimable gift of a Saviour, to atone for sin, and to mediate between God and man†; that there might be a way opened for the communication of mercy to sinners, without prejudice to the honour of the perfections and government of God—this gift was the effect of his own rich grace and love‡, no less unthought of and undesired, than undeserved, by fallen man.

III. Wherever this love of God to man is made known by the Gospel, there is encouragement, and a command given to "all men every where to repent§." The manifestation of the eternal Word in the human nature, and his death upon the cross, are spoken of as the highest display of the wisdom and goodness of God. Designed to give us in one and the same transaction, and the most affecting sense of the evil of sin.

* Rom. iii. 23.
† John iii. 16.
‡ Rom. v. 6. 8.
§ Acts xvii. 30, 31.

and the strongest assurance imaginable, that there is forgiveness with God*.

IV. Men, while blinded by pride and prejudice, enslaved to sinful passions, and under the influence of this present evil world, neither can nor will receive the truth in the love of it†. They are prepossessed, and pre-engaged. This, at least, is evidently the case with many people in this favoured nation, who, when the Gospel is proposed to them in the most unexceptionable manner, not only disregard, but treat it with a pointed contempt and indignation. Such was its reception at the beginning‡, and we are not to wonder, therefore, that it is so at this day.

V. As all mankind spring from one stock, there are not two different sorts of men by nature; consequently they who receive the Gospel, are no better in themselves than they are who reject it§. The apostle, writing to the believers at Corinth, having enumerated a catalogue, in which he comprises some of the most flagitious and infamous characters‖, and allowed to be so by the common consent of mankind, adds, "Such were some of "you." Surely it cannot be said, that they who had degraded themselves below the brutes, by their abominable practices, were better disposed than others to receive that Gospel which is not more distinguished by the sublimity of its doctrine, than by the purity and holiness of conversation which it enjoins!

VI. It seems, therefore, at least highly probable, that all men universally, if left to themselves, would act

* Rom. iii. 24, 25.
† 2 Cor. iv. 4.; John vi. 44.; v. 40.
‡ Luke iv. 28, 29.; Acts xvii. 18.
§ Eph. ii. 3. ‖ 1 Cor. vi. 9—11.

as the majority do to whom the word of salvation is sent; that is, they would reject and despise it. And it is undeniable, that some, who in the day of God's power have cordially received the Gospel, did for a season oppose it with no less pertinacity, than any of those who have continued to hate and resist it to the end of life. Saul of Tarsus was an eminent instance*. He did not merely slight the doctrine of a crucified Saviour; but, according to his mistaken views, thought himself bound in conscience to suppress those who embraced it. He breathed out threatenings and slaughter, and, as he expresses it himself, "was exceedingly mad "against them†," and made havoc of them. His mind was filled with this bitter and insatiable rage, at the moment when the Lord Jesus appeared to him in his way to Damascus. Is it possible that a man thus disposed should suddenly become a preacher of the faith which he had long laboured to destroy, if his heart and views had not been changed by a supernatural agency? or that the like prejudices in other persons can be removed in any other manner?

VII. If all men had heard the Gospel in vain, "then "Christ would have died in vain." But this is prevented by the covenanted office and influence of the Holy Spirit‡, who accompanies the word with his energy, and makes it the power of God to the salvation of those who believe. He prepares the minds of sinners, and, as in the case of Lydia §, opens their hearts to understand and receive the truth, in the love of it.

VIII. But who will presume to say, that when God

* Acts ix. 1. † Acts xxvi. 11.
‡ John xvi. 8. § Acts xvi. 14.

was pleased to make a proposal of mercy to a race of rebels, he was likewise bound to overcome the obstinacy of men, in every case, and to compel them to accept it by an act of his invincible power? If he does thus interpose in favour of some, it is an act of free mercy to which they have no claim. For if we had a claim, the benefit would be an act of justice, rather than of mercy. May not the great Sovereign of the world "do what he will with his own*?" And nothing is more peculiarly and eminently his own than his mercy. Yes, we are assured, that "he will have "mercy on whom he will have mercy†;" and whom he will, he may justly leave to be hardened in their impenitence and unbelief. We have all deserved to be so left; but he, as the potter over the clay, has power and right to make a difference, as it seemeth good in his sight. And "who will say unto him, What doest "thou‡?"

IX. When sinners are effectually called by the Gospel, then they are visibly chosen out of the world§, in the spirit and tempers of which they before lived, disobedient and deceived, even as others. "Old things "pass away, and all things become new‖." Their hopes and fears, their companions and pleasures, their pursuits and aims, are all changed. The change in these respects is so evident, that they are soon noticed and marked, pitied or derided, by those from whom they are now separated. And I think they who really experience this change will willingly ascribe it to the grace of God.

X. But if they are thus chosen in time, it follows of

* Matth. xx. 15. † Rom. ix. 18. ‡ Job ix. 12.
§ John xv. 19. ‖ 2 Cor. v. 17.

course that they were chosen from everlasting. Both these expressions, when applied to this subject, amount to the same thing; and the seeming difference between them is chiefly owing to our weakness and ignorance. To the infinite and eternal God our little distinctions of past, present, and future, are nothing. We think unworthily of the unchangeable Jehovah, and liken him too much to ourselves, if we suppose that he can form a new purpose. If it be his pleasure to convert a sinner to-day, he had the same gracious design in favour of that sinner yesterday, at the day of his birth, a thousand years before he was born, and a thousand ages, (to speak according to our poor conceptions,) before the world began. For that mode of duration which we call *time*, has no respect to him "who inhabiteth "eternity*."

With regard to those who reject the declaration of the mercy of God, who, though called and invited by the Gospel, and often touched by the power of his Holy Spirit, will not come to the Saviour for life, but persist in their determination to go on in their sins, their ruin is not only unavoidable, but just in the highest degree. And though, like the wicked servant in the parable†, they cavil against the Lord, their mouths will be stopped‡, when he shall at length appear, to plead with them, face to face. Then their cobweb-excuses will fail them, and the proper ground of their condemnation will be, that when he sent them light, they turned from it, "and chose darkness, rather than light, because their "deeds were evil §."

II. The great privilege of the elect, comprehensive

* Isa. lvii. 15. † Matth. xxv. 24.
‡ Rom. iii. 19. § John iii. 19.

of every blessing, is, that they are justified, finally and authoritatively justified, from all that can possibly be laid to their charge; for "it is God" himself "who justifieth" them.

The justification of a sinner before God by faith in the obedience and atonement of Christ, is considered by many persons, in these days of refinement, in no better light than as a branch of a scholastic theology, which is now exploded as uncouth and obsolete. At the Reformation, it was the turning point between the Protestants and Papists. Luther deemed it the criterion of a flourishing or a falling church; that is, he judged the church would always be in a thriving or a declining state, in proportion as the importance of this doctrine was attended to. How important it appeared to our English reformers, many of whom sealed their testimony to it with their blood, may be known by the writings of Cranmer, Latimer, Philpot, and others; and by the Articles of the Church of England, which are still of so much authority by law, that no person can be admitted into holy orders amongst us, till he has declared and subscribed his assent to them. But I hope never to preach a doctrine to my hearers which needs the names and authority of men, however respectable, for its support. "Search the Scriptures*;" and judge by them of the importance of this doctrine. Judge of it by the text now before us. The apostle speaks of it as sufficient to silence every charge, to free from all condemnation, and inseparably connected with eternal life; for those "whom God justifies he will also glorify†." Though volumes have been written upon the subject, I think it may be explained in few words. Every one must

* John v. 39. † Rom. viii. 30.

an account of himself to God; and the judgment will proceed according to the tenour of his holy word. "By "the law no flesh can be justified, for all have sinned*:" but they who believe the Gospel will be "justified "from all things†," for which the law would otherwise condemn them; and, as "they who believe not are "condemned already‡," so believers are already "justified by faith, and have peace with God, through our "Lord Jesus Christ§," in the present life. They plead guilty to the charge of the law; but they can likewise plead, that they renounce all hope and righteousness in themselves, and upon the warrant of the word of promise, put their whole trust in Jesus, "as the end of the "law for righteousness to every one that believeth‖:" and this plea is accepted. "To him that worketh not, "but believeth on him who justifieth the ungodly, his "faith is counted for righteousness**," and his sins are no more remembered against him††.

This justification, in its own nature, is authoritative, complete, and final. It is an act of God's mercy, which, because founded upon the mediation of Jesus, may, with no less truth, be styled an act of his justice, whereby the believing sinner is delivered from the curse of the law, from the guilt and power of sin, and is "translated "into the kingdom of his dear Son‡‡." It includes the pardon of all sin, and admission to the state of a child of God—It is a "passing from death unto life§§." By faith of the operation of God, the sinner, once afar off, is brought nigh, is accepted in the Beloved, and becomes one with him, as the branch is united to the vine, and

* Rom. iii. 19, 20. † Acts xiii. 39. ‡ John iii. 18.
§ Rom. v. 1. ‖ Rom. x. 4. ** Rom. iv. 5.
†† Heb. viii. 12. ‡‡ Col. i. 13. §§ John v. 24.

the members with the head*. The sanctification of a believer is imperfect and gradual; but his justification in this sense, from the moment when he begins to live a life of faith in the Son of God, is perfect, and incapable of increase. The principle of life in a newborn infant, and the privileges dependent upon his birth (if he be the heir of a great family,) are the same from the first hour, as at any future time. He is stronger as he grows up to the stature of a man, but is not more alive; he grows up likewise more into the knowledge and enjoyment of his privileges, but his right to them admits of no augmentation; for he derives it, not from his years, or his stature, or his powers, but from the relation in which he stands as a child to his father. Thus it is with those who are born from above; they are immediately the children and heirs of God, though for a time, like minors while under age, they may seem to "differ but little from servants†;" and it doth not yet appear what they shall be.

But, though justification in the sight of God be connected with the reality of faith, the comfortable perception of it in our own consciences is proportionable to the degree of faith. In young converts, therefore, it is usually weak. They are well satisfied that Jesus is the only Saviour, and they have no doubt of his ability and sufficiency in that character, in favour of those who put their trust in him; but they are suspicious and jealous of themselves; they are apprehensive of something singular in their own case, which may justly exclude them from his mercy, or they fear that they do not believe aright. But the weakest believer is a child of God; and true faith, though at first like a grain of

* John xv. 5. † Gal. iv. 1, 2.

mustard-seed, is interested in all the promises of the Gospel. If it be true, it will grow*, it will attain to a more simple dependence upon its great object, and will work its way through a thousand doubts and fears, (which, for a season, are not without their use,) till at length the weak Christian becomes strong in faith, "strong in the "Lord," and is enabled to say, "I know whom I "have believed†!" Who shall lay any thing to my charge? Who shall condemn? It is God who justifieth. It is Christ who died for me and rose again.

But especially at the great day, the Lord the Judge shall ratify their justification publicly before assembled worlds. Then "every tongue that riseth in judgment "against them‡" shall be put to silence. Then Satan will be utterly confounded, and many who despise them on earth, will be astonished, and say—"These are they "whose lives we accounted madness, and their end to "be without honour! How are they numbered among "the children of God§!"

The right knowledge of this doctrine is a source of abiding joy; it likewise animates love, zeal, gratitude, and all the noblest powers of the soul, and produces a habit of cheerful and successful obedience to the whole will of God. But it may be, and too often is, misunderstood and abused. If you receive it by divine teaching, it will fill you "with those fruits of righteousness, which "are by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God‖." But if you learn it only from men and books, if you are content with the notion of it in your head, instead of the powerful experience of it in your heart, it will have a contrary effect. Such a lifeless form, even of the truth

* Mark iv. 26. † 2 Tim. i. 12. ‡ Isa. liv. 17.
§ Wisdom v. 4, 5, ‖ Phil. i. 11.

itself, will probably make you heady and high-minded, censorious of others, trifling in your spirit, and unsettled in your conduct. Oh! be afraid of resembling the foolish virgins*, of having the lamp of your profession expire in darkness for want of the oil of grace; lest when the Bridegroom cometh, you should find the door shut against you.

SERMON XLVII.

THE INTERCESSION OF CHRIST.

ROMANS viii. 34.

Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.

THE redemption of the soul is precious. "Fools "make a mock of sin†." But they will not think lightly of it who duly consider the majesty, authority, and goodness of him against whom it is committed; and who are taught by what God actually has done, what sin rendered necessary to be done, before a sinner could have a well-grounded hope of forgiveness. For wisdom does nothing in vain. The death of the Son of God would have been in vain‡, if the great design, in favour of sinful men, could have been effected by inferior means. But as he, in the office of Mediator, was the hope of mankind from the beginning; so the great work he has accomplished, and the characters

* Matth. xxv. 1—12. † Prov. xiv. 9. ‡ Gal. ii. 21.

he sustains, when made known to the conscience, are, in fact, sufficient to relieve in every case, to answer every charge, and to satisfy the believer in Jesus that there is now no condemnation to fear. There are many, (as we have observed,) ready to accuse, but it is in vain; the charge may be true, but it is over-ruled. Who shall dare to condemn, if things be as the apostle states them in this passage? Whoever would impeach the hope of a true believer, must prove, (if he can,) that Christ did not die; or that he did not rise from the dead; or that he was not admitted into the presence of God on our behalf; or that he is unmindful of his promise to make intercession for all who come unto God by him. For if these points are indubitable and sure, it is impossible that the soul, which has trusted in Jesus, and put its cause into his hands, can miscarry.

The death and resurrection of our Lord, his appearance in our nature, clothed with glory, seated on the right hand of the Majesty on high, as the High Priest of our profession, can scarcely be considered too often. These old truths are always new to those who love him, and are the food by which their souls live. Yet I shall not at present repeat what I have offered upon them from former passages, but shall chiefly confine myself to the subject of his intercession, which has not, until now, expressly occurred to our meditations.

The word the apostle uses here, and in Heb. vii. 25. "seeing he ever liveth to make intercession," occurs likewise Acts xxv. 24. where Festus speaks of the process managed by the Jews against Paul; and also Rom. xi. 2. of Elijah's making intercession to God against Israel. From these passages, compared together, we may observe that the word is to be taken in a large sense. He pleads our cause, he manages our

concerns, he answers our enemies. Who, then, shall condemn those for whom the Lord Jesus thus employs his power and his love? He is our "Advocate*." He takes upon him our whole concern. He pleads as a priest, and manages as a king, for those who come unto God by him.

I. He pleads as a priest. His office of intercession has a plain reference to his great instituted type, the high priest under the Levitical dispensation; who, according to the appointment of God, entered within the vail, to present the blood of the sacrifice before the mercy seat†. We have a clear and infallible explanation of the design of this institution. "Now "when these things were thus ordained, the priests "went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing "the service of God. But into the second went the "high priest alone once every year, not without blood, "which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the "people. The Holy Ghost this signifying, that the "way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, "while the first tabernacle was yet standing. Which "was a figure for the time then present, in which were "offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make "him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the "conscience; which stood only in meats and drinks, "and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed "on them until the time of reformation. But Christ "being come an High Priest of good things to come, "by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made "with hands, that is to say, not of this building; nei-"ther by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own "blood, he entered in once into the holy place, having

* 1 John ii. 1. † Lev. xvi. 2.

" obtained eternal redemption for us*," &c. Thus Jesus " is passed into the heavens," entered into the holy of holies, with his own blood. His presence there, in our nature, with the marks of his sufferings for us, as the Lamb that has been slain, is an unceasing, virtual intercession on our behalf. I meddle not with curious questions on this subject, as to the manner in which his intercession is carried on: it is sufficient to know that he is there, and there for us, as our representative. This consideration is of continual use, to animate and encourage sinners in their approach to God. There are three cases particularly, in which the heart that knows its own bitterness must sink, were it not for the relieving thought, that there is an Advocate with the " Father," a " High Priest," who, by his intercession, is " able to save to the uttermost."

1. When the mind is burdened with guilt. Great is the distress of an awakened conscience. The sinner now is sensible of wants, which God alone can supply, and of miseries, from which he cannot be extricated but by an almighty arm. But when he thinks of the majesty and holiness of God, he is troubled, and adopts the language of the prophet, " Wo is me! I am un- " done†." He dares not draw near to God, nor does he dare to keep any longer at a distance from him. But when such a one is enabled to look to Jesus as the intercessor, what light and comfort does he receive! For the Gospel speaks inviting language. Let not the weary and heavy laden sinner fear to approach. Your peace is already made in the court above, and your advocate is waiting to introduce you. Lift up your heart to him, and think you hear him in effect,

* Heb. ix. 6.—12. † Isa. vi. 5.

saying, "Father, there is another sinner who has heard "of my name, and desires to trust in me. Father, I "will, that he also may be delivered from going down "into the pit, and interested in the ransom which I "have provided."

2. When we are deeply conscious of our defects in duty. If we compare our best performances with the demands of the law, the majesty of God, and the unspeakable obligations we are under; if we consider our innumerable sins of omission, and that the little we can do, is polluted and defiled by the mixture of evil thoughts, and the working of selfish principles, aims, and motives, which, though we disapprove, we are unable to suppress: we have great reason to confess, "To "us belong shame and confusion of face*." But we are relieved by the thought, that Jesus, the High Priest, bears the iniquity of our holy things, perfumes our prayers with the incense of his mediation, and washes our tears in his own blood. This inspires a confidence, that though we are unworthy of the least of his mercies, we may humbly hope for a share in the greatest blessings he bestows, because we are heard and accepted, not on the account of our own prayers and services, but in the beloved son of God, who maketh intercession for us. Thus the wisdom and love of God have provided a wonderful expedient, which so far as it is rightly understood, and cordially embraced, while it lays the sinner low as the dust in point of humiliation and self-abasement, fills him at the same time with a hope full of glory, which with respect to its foundation, cannot be shaken; and with respect to its object, can be satisfied with nothing less than all the fulness of

* Dan. ix. 7.

God. There are favoured seasons in which the believer, having a lively impression of the authority and love of the Intercessor, can address the great Jehovah as his Father, with no less confidence, than if he was holy and spotless as the angels before the throne, at the very moment that he has abundant cause to say, "Behold, I am vile! I abhor myself, and repent in dust "and ashes*!"

3. This powerful and prevalent intercession abundantly compensates for the poverty and narrowness of our prayers. Experience confirms what the Scripture declares of our insufficiency to order our own cause before the Lord, to specify our various wants, and to fill our mouths with such arguments, as may engage the attention, and enliven the affections of our hearts: "We know not how to pray as we ought†." And though the Holy Spirit teaches believers to form petitions, which, in the main, are agreeable to the will of God, yet we often mistake and ask amiss; we often forget what we ought to ask, and we are too often cold, negligent, weary, distracted, and formal in prayer. How prone are we to enter by prayer into the Lord's presence, as the thoughtless "horse rushes into the "battle‡!" to speak to God as if we were only speaking into the air, and to have our thoughts dissipated and wandering to the ends of the earth, while his holy name is upon our polluted lips! It is well for us, that God is both able and gracious to do more than we can ask or think; but that he actually does so, for such unworthy creatures, is owing to our Intercessor. He knows all our wants, and pleads and provides accordingly. He is not negligent though we too frequently

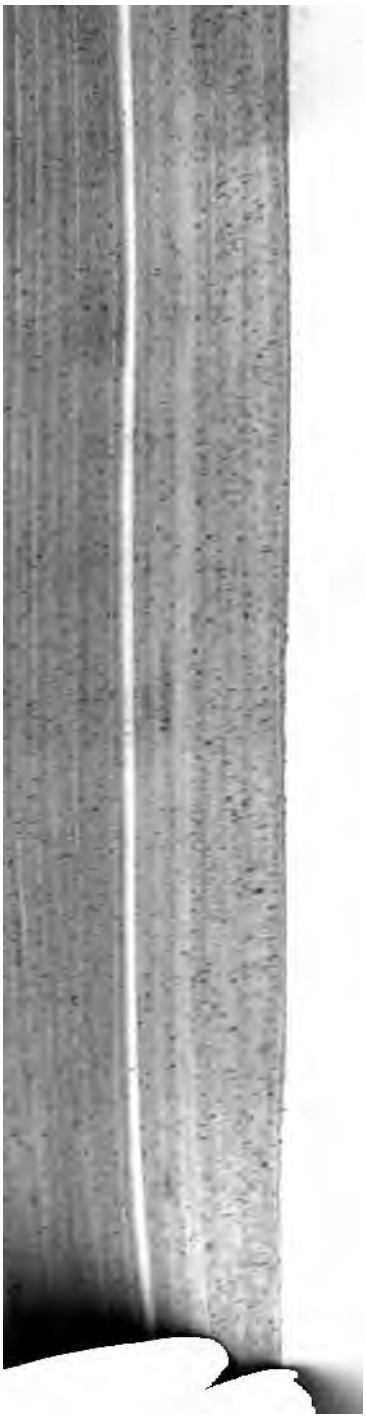
* *Job* xl. 4.; xlii. 6. † Rom. viii. 26. ‡ Jer. viii. 6

are. He prayed for Peter's safety, before Peter himself was aware of his danger*. Have we not sometimes been, as it were, surprised and shamed by the Lord's goodness, when he has condescended to bestow special and needful mercies upon us, before we thought of asking for them? These are affecting proofs of our Intercessor's attention and care, and that he is always mindful of us. But,

II. Jesus the High Priest is upon a throne. He is a King, "King of saints, and King of nations." He is not only a righteous advocate, but he possesses all authority and power. And it belongs to his office as King, effectually to manage for those in whose behalf he intercedes. I have already observed, that the original word includes this sense.

1. He is the source and fountain of their supplies. All their springs are in him. The fulness of wisdom, grace, and consolation, out of which they are invited to receive, resides in him. And, therefore, he says, "If "ye ask any thing in my name, I will do it†." Not merely I will present your petitions, but I will fulfil them myself. For all things are committed into his hands, and it is he "with whom we have to do‡." He therefore enjoins us, if we believe or trust in God, to "believe also in him§." His invitations, "If any man "thirst, let him come unto me and drink‖;" "Whoso-"ever will, let him take of the water of life freely**;" equally express his sovereignty and his munificence. On him the eyes of all who know him, wait from age to age, and are not disappointed. "He opens his

* Luke xxii. 31, 32.
† John xiv. 14.
‡ Heb. iv. 13.
§ John xiv. 1.
‖ John vii. 37.
** Rev. xxii. 17.



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* Job xl. 4.; xlii. 6. † Rom. viii.

"hand, and satisfies them with good*." Nor is the store of his bounty diminished by all that he has distributed, for it is unsearchable and inexhaustible; like the light of the sun, which gladdens the eyes of millions at once, has done so from the beginning, and will continue to do so to the end of time.

2. He appoints and adjusts their various dispensations, with an unerring suitableness to their several states, capacities, and circumstances. If a skilful gardener had the command of the weather, he would not treat all his plants, nor the same plant at all times, exactly alike. Continual rain, or continual sunshine, would be equally unfavourable to their growth and fruitfulness. In his kingdom of providence, he so proportions the rain and the sunshine to each other, that the corn is usually brought forward from the seed to the blade, the ear, and the full ripe ear. And I believe it would be always so, were it not for the prevalence of sin, which sometimes makes the "heavens over our "head brass, the earth under our feet iron†," and turns a fruitful land into barrenness. So, in his kingdom of grace, he trains his people up by various exercises. He delights in their prosperity, and does not willingly grieve them. But afflictions in their present state are necessary; and his blessing makes them salutary. But this is their great privilege, that their comforts and their crosses are equally from his hand, are equally tokens of his love, and alike directed to work together for their good. He appoints the bounds of their habitations, numbers the hairs of their heads, and is their guide and guard, their sun and shield, even unto death. Here they meet with many changes, but none that are un-

* Psal. cxlv. 16. † Deut. xxviii. 23.

noticed by him, none that can separate them from his love; and they all concur in leading them on to a state of unchangeable and endless joy*.

3. He is "the Captain of their salvation†." They are his soldiers, and fight under his eye; yet the battle is not theirs, but his. Israel of old were to muster their forces, to range themselves for the fight, to use every precaution and endeavour, as though success depended entirely upon themselves. Yet they obtained not the victory by their own sword, but it was the Lord who fought for them, and trod down their enemies before them; and they had little more to do than to pursue the vanquished, and to divide the spoil. And thus it is in the warfare which true Christians maintain, "not against flesh and blood only, but against princi- "palities and powers‡;" against the spirit of the world, and against Satan and his legions. They fight in his cause, but he upholds them and conquers for them. Their enemies are too many and too mighty for them to grapple with in their own strength; but he rebukes them, and pleads the cause of his people. His gracious interposition in their favour, is beautifully set forth, together with its effects, in the vision which the prophet saw, when he was sent to encourage the ruler and people of the Jews, against the difficulties they met with when rebuilding the temple. He "saw Joshua "the High priest," who, in that character, represented the collective body of the people, "standing before t "Lord, clothed in filthy garments, and Sata "at his right hand to resist him§." Such as sinners, all our righteousnesses are a

* 2 Cor. iv. 17. † Heb. ii
‡ Eph. vi. 12. § Zech.

and such are the attempts of our enemy, to deter us from approaching to him who alone can relieve us, or to distress us when we appear before him. But when Joshua could not speak for himself, the Lord spake for him, claimed him for his own, as a brand plucked out of the fire, silenced his adversary, clothed him with change of raiment, and set a fair mitre upon his head. Thus David acknowledged the Lord's goodness, in providing him a table in the midst of his enemies*; who saw with envy his privileges, but were not able to prevent his enjoyment of them. Many a time, the Lord thus comforts and feeds his people, while waiting on him in secret, or attending his pulic ordinances: and were our eyes opened, like the eyes of Elisha's servant, to behold what is very near, though unseen, we should feel the force of the Psalmist's observation. The powers of darkness surround us, their malice against us is heightened by the favour of our good Shepherd towards us; they rage, but in vain; for though they could presently deprive us of peace, and fill us with anguish, if we were left exposed to their assaults, they are under a restraint, and can do nothing without his permission. When he is pleased to give quietness, "who then can make trouble†?" He preserves and provides for his sheep, in the midst of wolves.

We may close this part of our subject with two or three reflections, which, though as to the substance of them I may have offered you before, are always seasonable and suitable, when we are speaking of the power and grace of MESSIAH.

1. How precious is this Saviour! How justly is he entitled to the chief place in the hearts of those who

* Psal. xxiii. 5. † Job xxxiv. 29.

know him! In the work of salvation, from the first step, to the last, he is all in all. If he had not died and risen again, we must have died for ever. If he had not ascended into heaven, there to appear in the presence of God for us, we must have been thrust down into the lowest hell. If he did not plead for us, we could not, we durst not, offer a word in our own behalf. If he was not on our part, engaged to keep us night and day, our enemies would soon be too hard for us. May we, therefore, give him the glory due to his name, and cleave to him, and trust in him alone.

2. How safe are the people of whom he undertakes the care! While his eye is upon them, his ear open to their prayer, and his arm of power stretched out for their protection; while he remembers that word of promise, upon which he himself has caused them to hope; while he retains that faithfulness which encouraged them to commit their souls to him, it is impossible that any weapon or stratagem formed against them can prevail. There are many, it is true, who will rise up against them, but God is for them, and with them, a very present help in trouble*. They are full of wants and fears, and in themselves liable to many charges; but since Jesus is their head, their security, their intercessor, no needful good shall be withheld from them, no charge admitted against them, none shall condemn them, for it is God himself who justifies the believer in Jesus.

3. If these things be so, how much are they to be pitied, who hear of them without being affected or influenced by them? Will you always be content with hearing? "Oh taste and see that the Lord is good†!"

* Psal. xlvi. 1. † Psal. xxxiv. 8.

Should you at last be separated from those with whom you now join in public worship; should you see them admitted into the kingdom of God, and you yourselves be thrust out; your present advantages would then prove an aggravation of your guilt and misery. As yet, there is room. Strive to enter while the gate of mercy remains open. Think of the solemnities of that great day. Many will then be condemned, though they who believe in the Son of God will be justified. Consider who will condemn them, "God himself*." From his inquisition there can be no retreat; from his sentence there can be no appeal. And consider what the condemnation will be. A final exclusion from his favour; a never-ceasing sense of his awful displeasure! a state of eternal horror and despair, without mitigation, without the smallest ray of hope. Can you deliberately give up all claim to happiness, and determine to rush "upon the thick bosses of God's buckler†," to defy his power, and to dare his threatenings, rather than forego the transitory and delusive pleasures of sin? and can you do this, with the Gospel sounding in your ears? May the Lord prevent it! However, observe you are once more warned, once more invited. If now at last, after so many delays, so much perverseness on your part, you will honestly and earnestly seek him, he will be found of you. But if you persist in your obstinacy, your condemnation will be inevitable and sure.

* Psal. l. 6. † Job xv. 26.

SERMON XLVIII.

THE SONG OF THE REDEEMED.

REVELATION v. 9.

—Thou—hast redeemed us to God, by thy blood, [out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.]

THE extent, variety, and order of the creation, proclaim the glory of God. He is likewise *Maximus in minimis.* The smallest of his works that we are capable of examining, such, for instance, as the eye or the wing of a little insect, the creature of a day, are stamped with an inimitable impression of his wisdom and power. Thus in his written word, there is a greatness, considering it as a *whole*, and a beauty and accuracy in the smaller parts, analogous to what we observe in the visible creation, and answerable to what an enlightened and humble mind may expect in a book which bears the character of a divine revelation. A single verse, a single clause, when viewed, (if I may so speak,) in the microscope of close meditation, is often found to contain a fulness, a world of wonders. And though a connected and comprehensive acquaintance with the whole Scripture be desirable and useful, and is no less the privilege, than the duty, of those who have capacity and time at their own disposal to acquire it; yet there is a gracious accommodation to the weakness of some persons, and the circumstances of others. So that in many parts of Scripture, whatever is immediately necessary to confirm our faith, to animate or regulate our

practice, is condensed into a small compass, and comprised into a few verses; yea, sometimes a single sentence, when unfolded and examined, will be found to contain all the great principles of duty and comfort. Such is the sentence which I have now read to you. In the *Messiah*, it is inserted in the grand chorus taken from the twelfth and thirteenth verses of this chapter. And as it may lead us to a compendious recapitulation of the whole subject, and, by the Lord's blessing, may prepare us to join in the following ascription of praise to him that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb; I purpose to consider it in its own proper connexion, as a part of the leading song of the redeemed before the throne, in which the angels cannot share; though the angels from their love to redeemed sinners, and from their views of the manifold wisdom and glory of God in visiting such sinners with such a salvation, cheerfully take a part in the general chorus.

The redemption spoken of, is suited to the various cases of sinners of every nation, people, and language. And many sinners of divers descriptions, and from distant situations, scattered abroad into all lands, through a long succession of ages, will, by the efficacy of this redemption, be gathered together into one*. They will constitute one family, united in one great Head†. When they shall fully attain the end of their hope, and encircle the throne, day without night, rejoicing, their remembrance of what they once were, their sense of the happiness they are raised to, and of the great consideration to which they owe their deliverance and their exaltation, will excite a perpetual joyful acknowledgment to this purport. They were once lost, but could contribute

* John xi. 52. † Eph. iii. 14, 15.

nothing to their own recovery. Therefore they ascribe all the glory to their Saviour. They strike their golden harps, and sing in strains, loud as from numbers without number, sweet as from blest voices, "Thou art worthy "—for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God "by thy blood, out of every kindred, and tongue, and "people, and nation."

But though this song, and this joy, will only be consummated in heaven, the commencement takes place upon earth. Believers, during their present state of warfare, are taught to sing it; in feebler strains indeed, but the subject of their joy, and the object of their praise, are the same which inspire the harps and songs in the world of light. May I not say, that this life is the time of their rehearsal? They are now learning their song, and advancing in meetness to join in the chorus on high, which, as death successively removes them, is continually increasing by the accession of fresh voices. All that they know, or desire to know, all that they possess or hope for, is included in this ascription.

I take the last clause of the verse into the subject. The words suggest three principal points to our consideration.

I. The benefit, "Redemption to God."

II. The redemption-price, "By thy blood."

III. The extent of the benefit—to a people "out of "every kindred, and tongue, and nation."

I. "Thou hast redeemed us to God." Redemption or ransom is applicable to a state of imprisonment for debt, and to a state of bondage or slavery. From these ideas, taken together, we may form some estimate of the misery of our fallen state; a theme which, if I cannot

insist upon at large in every discourse, I would never wholly omit. For we can neither understand the grace, nor enjoy the comfort of the Gospel, but in proportion as we have a heart-felt and abiding conviction of our wretched condition as sinners without it. They who think themselves whole, know not their need of a physician*; but to the sick he is welcome.

If a man, shut up in prison for a heavy debt, which he is utterly incapable of discharging, should obtain his liberty, in consideration of payment made for him by another, he might be properly said to be redeemed from imprisonment. This supposition will apply to our subject. The law and justice of God have demands upon us, which we cannot answer. We are therefore shut up, under the law, in unbelief, helpless and hopeless, till we know and can plead the engagement of a surety for us. For a time, like Peter, we are sleeping in our prison, regardless of danger†. The first sensible effect of the grace of God is, to awaken us from this insensibility. Then we begin to feel the horrors of our dungeon, and the strength of our chains, and to tremble under the apprehension of an impending doom. But grace proceeds to reveal the Saviour and friend of sinners, and to encourage our application to him. In a good hour the chains fall off, the bars of iron and brass are broken asunder, and the prison-doors fly open. The prisoner understands that all his great debt is forgiven, blesses his Deliverer, obtains his liberty, and departs in peace.

We are likewise in bondage, the servants, the slaves, of a harder task-master than Pharaoh was to Israel.

* Matth. ix. 12. † Acts, xii. 6—10.

Satan, though not by right, yet by a righteous permission, tyrannizes over us, till Jesus makes us free*. The way of transgressors is hard†. Though the solicitations and commands of that enemy who worketh in the children of disobedience‡, are, in some respects, suited to our depraved inclinations; yet the consequences are grievous. A burdened conscience, a wasted constitution, a ruined fortune and character, swiftly and closely follow the habits of intemperance and lewdness; and they who seem to walk in a smoother path, are deceived, mortified, and disappointed daily. If persons who live openly and habitually in a course that is contrary to the rule of God's word, "speak swelling words "of vanity§," and boast of their liberty, believe them not. We are sure they carry that in their bosom, which hourly contradicts their assertions. Yea, sometimes their slavery is so galling, that they attempt to escape, but in vain. They are soon retaken, and their bonds made stronger. The issue of their short-lived reformations, which they defer as long as possible, and at last set about with reluctance, usually is, that their latter end proves worse than their beginning. At most, they only exchange one sinful habit for another, sensuality for avarice, or prodigality for pride. The strong one armed, will maintain his dominion, till the stronger than he interposes and says, "Loose him and let him "go, for I have found a ransom." Then by the virtue of the redemption-price, "the prey is taken from the "mighty, and the captive is delivered‖." Then the enslaved sinner, like the man out of whom the legion was cast, sits at the feet of Jesus, in peace, "and

* John viii. 34. 36. † Prov. xiii. 15. ‡ Eph. ii. 2.
§ 2 Pet. ii. 18, 19. ‖ Isa. xlix. 24. 25.

" in his right mind*." He becomes the Lord's freedman.

For he is not only delivered from guilt and thrall, he " is redeemed to God." He is now restored to his original state, as an obedient and dependent creature, devoted to his Creator, conformed to his will and image, and admitted to communion with him in love. These are blessings which alone can satisfy the soul, and without which it is impossible for man to be happy. While he is ignorant of his proper good, and seeks it in creatures, he is, and must be, wretched. Madness is in his heart, a deceived, disordered imagination turns him aside, and he feeds upon ashes, and upon the wind†. But by grace he is renewed to a sound judgment, his mind receives a right direction, and he is " turned from " darkness to light, from the power of Satan to " God‡."

II. What unspeakably, and beyond conception, enhances the value of this deliverance is, the consideration of the means by which it is effected. For it is not merely a deliverance, but " a redemption." It is not an act of mere mercy, but of mercy harmonizing with justice. It is not an act of power only, but of unexampled and expensive love. " Thou hast redeemed " us by thy blood!"

The sentence denounced by the law against transgressors, was death. And therefore when MESSIAH became our surety to satisfy the law for us, he must die. The expression of " his blood," is often used figuratively for his death, perhaps to remind us how he died. His was a bloody death. When he was in his agony in Gethsemane, his " sweat was as great drops of blood,

* Mark v. 15. † Isa. xliv. 20. ‡ Acts xxvi. 18.

"falling down to the ground*." His blood flowed when he gave his back to the smiters, under the painful strokes of the scourging he endured previous to his crucifixion. It flowed from his head, when the soldiers, having mocked his character of King by crowning him with thorns, by their rude blows forced the thorns into his temples. His blood streamed from the wounds made by the spikes, which pierced his hands and his feet, when they fastened him to the cross. When he hung upon the cross, his body was full of wounds, and covered with blood. And, after his death, another large wound was made in his side, from which issued blood and water. Such was the redemption-price he paid for sinners, his blood, the blood of his heart. Without shedding of blood there could be no remission. Nor could any blood answer the great design but his. Not any; not all the bloody sacrifices appointed by the law of Moses could take away sin, as it respects the conscience, nor afford a plea with which a sinner could venture to come before the High God†. But the blood of MESSIAH, in whom were united the perfections of the divine nature and the real properties of humanity, and which the apostle therefore styles "the blood of God‡," this precious blood cleanses from all sin. It is exhibited as a propitiation of perpetual efficacy, "by which "God declares his righteousness," no less than his mercy, "in forgiving iniquities," and shows himself just to the demands of his holiness, and the honour of his government, when he accepts and justifies the sinner who believes in Jesus§.

If these things were understood and attended to,

* Luke xxii. 44. † Micah vi. 6.
‡ Acts xx. 28. § Rom. iii. 25, 26.

would it be thought wonderful that this Saviour is very precious to those who believe in him, and who obtain redemption by his blood? How can it possibly be otherwise? Grace like this, when known, must captivate and fix the heart! Not only to save, but to die, and to die for his enemies! Such costly love, productive of such glorious consequences, and to such unworthy creatures! Surely the apostle's mind was filled and fired with these considerations, when, authenticating an epistle with his own hand, he subjoined this emphatical close, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus "Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha*!" Do you think, my brethren, that the apostle took pleasure in denouncing so severe a sentence against all those who did not see, (as we say,) with his eyes? Had he so little affection for sinners, that he could thus consign them to destruction by multitudes, for differing from him in what some persons only deem an opinion? Rather consider him, not as breathing out his own wishes, but as speaking in the name and on the behalf of God. He knew it must be, and he declared it would be so. It was no pleasure to him to see them determined to perish. On the contrary, he had great grief and sorrow of heart for them, even for the Jews, who had treated him with the greatest cruelty. Even for their sakes, he could have been content to be made an Anathema himself, that they might be saved†. But, upon the whole, he acquiesced in the will of God, and acknowledged it to be just, right, and equal, that if any man would not love the Lord Jesus Christ, after all that he had done and suffered for sinners, he should be accursed. By this comparison of the apostle's severe

* 1 Cor. xvi. 22 † Rom. ix. 3.

language with his compassionate temper, I am led to digress a little further. It suggests an apology for ministers of the Gospel in general. When we declare the terrors of the Lord, when we assure you that there is but one solid foundation for hope, and that, unless you love the Lord Jesus Christ, you must perish, some of our hearers account us bigotted, uncharitable, and bitter. But if you could see what passes in secret, how faithful ministers mourn over those who reject their message, how their disobedience cuts them to the heart, and abates the comfort they would otherwise find in your service; if you could believe us when we say, (I trust truly,) that we are ready to impart unto you, not the Gospel of God only, but our own souls also, because you are dear to us*, and we long for your salvation; then you would think more favourably of us. But, after all, we cannot, we dare not, soften our message to please men. What we find in the word of God we must declare. It would be at the peril of our souls, to "speak smooth things," to "prophecy de-"ceits†" to you; and, so far as we preach the truth, it will be at the peril of your souls, if we are disregarded.

III. The benefits of this redemption extend to a numerous people, who are said to be redeemed out of every kindred, tongue, and nation. I have, upon a former occasion, offered you my sentiments concerning the extent of the virtue of that blood which taketh away the sin of the world‡. But the clause now before us invites me to make a few additional observations upon a subject which, I conceive, it much concerns us rightly to understand.

* 1 Thes. ii. 8. † Isa. xxx. 10. ‡ Ser. XVI. p. 190.

The redeemed of the Lord are those who actually experience the power of his redemption, who are delivered from the dominion of sin and Satan, and brought into a state of liberty, peace, and holiness. That the people of every kindred, nation, and tongue, are not redeemed in this sense, universally, is as certain as evidence of facts, and express declarations of Scripture can make it. "Without holiness no man shall "see the Lord." Multitudes thus disqualified, will be found trembling, on the left hand of the Judge, at the great day. But "a remnant will be saved, according "to the election of grace." For they who differ, who are redeemed to the service of God, while others live and die in the love and service of sin, do not make themselves to differ*. It becomes the potsherds of the earth to ascribe to their Maker the glory of his sovereignty, and to acknowledge, that, if they have a good hope, it is because it pleased the Lord to make "them his people, who once were not his people†." Yet a way of conceiving of the doctrines of the divine sovereignty, and of a personal election unto life, has often obtained, which seems to have a tendency to render the mind narrow, selfish, and partial, and to straiten the exercise of that philanthropy which the genius and spirit of the Gospel powerfully inculcate. The best of us, perhaps, are more prone than we are aware of to assimilate the great God to ourselves, and to frame our ideas of Him too much according to our own image. So that often much of a man's natural disposition may be observed in the views he forms of the divine perfections and conduct; as on the other hand, his conceptions of the character of God strengthen and con-

* 1 Cor. iv. 7. † Hos. ii. 23.

firm him in his own tempers and habits. There are persons, who, being persuaded in their minds, (we would hope upon sure grounds,) that they themselves are of the elect, appear to be little concerned what may become of others. Their notions of God's sovereignty, and his right to do what he will with his own, though often insufficient to preserve them from repining and impatience under the common events of human life, raise them above all doubts and difficulties on a subject which the apostle speaks of as unsearchable and untraceable; where he acknowledges depths which he was unable to fathom*, all appear to them quite plain and easy; where he admires and adores, they arrogantly dispute, and determine *ex cathedra*, and harshly censure all who are not so eagle-sighted as themselves. Methinks they who know the worth of a soul, from its vast capacity for happiness and misery, and its immortal duration, cannot justly be blamed for allowing no limits to their benevolent wishes for the salvation of mankind, but the will of God, as it is plainly made known to us in his word. To this we are to submit, not as of necessity only, but cheerfully; assured that his will is wise, holy, and good; that the Judge of all the world will do right; and to wait for the day when he will condescend to clear up every difficulty, and give us that satisfaction which, in our present state of ignorance and weakness, we are incapable of receiving. Shall mortal man be more just, or can he be more merciful than God? It is a false compassion, founded in a blameable disregard of what is due to the glory of his great name, that prompts us to form a wish that his unerringly wise appointments could be otherwise than

* Rom. xi. 33.

they are. Yet it is a comfort to think that his mercy in which he delights, in which he is peculiarly said t be rich, and which is higher than the heavens, will, i its exercise, far exceed the bounds which some fallibl mortals would peremptorily assign to it. We must nc indulge conjecture and hypothesis further than th Scripture will warrant; but while we humbly depen upon this infallible light, we need not be afraid to fol low it, though it should, in some particulars, lead us little beyond the outlines of some long received, and, i the main, very valuable human systems of divinity.

I have repeatedly expressed my belief, that man prophecies respecting the spread and glory of the king dom of MESSIAH upon earth, have not yet receive their full accomplishment, and that a time is comin when many, (perhaps the greater part of mankind,) c all nations, and people, and languages, shall know th joyful sound of the Gospel, and walk in the light of th Redeemer's countenance. At present, I would con fine myself to consider what ground the Scriptur affords us to hope that there are many of every natior people, and tongue, even now, singing this song befor his throne.

The Revelations vouchsafed to the beloved discipl in Patmos, exhibit a succession of great events extend ing, (I suppose,) from the apostles' days to the end c time. But while only the learned can so much as at tempt to ascertain from history the dates and facts t which the prophecies already fulfilled refer, or to offe probable conjectures concerning the events as yet fu ture, (in which the most judicious commentators are fa from being agreed,) there are passages interspersec which seem designed to administer consolation t plain believers, by representations suited to rais

their thoughts to the state of the church triumphant Though they are unable to explain the particulars of what they read, there is a glory resulting from the whole, which animates their hope and awakens their joy. Of this kind I think is that vision*, in which the apostle saw the servants of God, who were sealed in their foreheads, in number one hundred and forty-four thousand; and, besides these, a great multitude which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands, and cried with a loud voice, saying, "Sal-"vation to our God, which sitteth upon the throne, "and to the Lamb," &c. I confess myself unable to expound this sublime passage, and to give the full or even the principal sense of it with certainty. But that it has some reference to what is now passing within the vail which hides the unseen world from our view, I cannot doubt. I propose my thoughts upon it with caution and diffidence. I dare not speak with that certainty which I feel myself warranted to use, when I set before you from Scripture the great truths which are essential to a life of faith in the Son of God; yet I hope to advance nothing that is contrary to Scripture, or to any deductions fairly and justly drawn from it.

Having premised this acknowledgment of my incompetence to decide positively, I venture to say, that by the hundred and forty-four thousand sealed in their foreheads, (a definite for an indefinite number, which is frequent in Scripture language,) I understand those, who, living to mature age, and where the Gospel is afforded, are enabled to make a public and visible pro-

* Rev. vii. 9. *ad finem.*

fession of religion, and are marked, as it were, in their foreheads, and known to whom they belong, by their open and habitual separation from the spirit and customs of the world which lieth in wickedness. And the exceeding great multitude, contradistinguished from these, I conceive to be those who are elsewhere styled the Lord's "hidden ones;" and that these are a great multitude indeed, gathered by him, who knows them that are his, out of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues. I may distribute them into the following classes:—

1. Infants. I think it at least highly probable, that when our Lord says, "Suffer little children to come "unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the "kingdom of heaven*," he does not only intimate the necessity of our becoming like little children in simplicity, as a qualification without which, (as he expressly declares in other places,) we cannot enter into his kingdom, but informs us of a fact, that the number of infants who are effectually redeemed to God by his blood, so greatly exceeds the aggregate of adult believers, that, comparatively speaking, his kingdom may be said to consist of little children. The apostle speaks of them as not having "sinned after the similitude of "Adam's transgression†," that is, with the consent of their understanding and will. And when he says "We must all appear before the judgment seat of "Christ," he adds, "that every man may give an account of what he has done in the body, whether it be "good or bad‡." But children who die in their infancy, have not done any thing in the body, either good or bad. It is true they are by nature evil, and must

* Matth. xix. 14. † Rom. v. 14. ‡ 2 Cor. v. 10.

if saved, be the subjects of a supernatural change. And though we cannot conceive how this change is to be wrought, yet I suppose few are so rash as to imagine it impossible that any infants can be saved. The same power that produces this change in some, can produce it in all; and therefore I am willing to believe, till the Scripture forbids me, that infants of all nations and kindreds, without exception, who die before they are capable of sinning after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who have done nothing in the body of which they can give an account, are included in the election of grace. They are born for a better world than this; they just enter this state of tribulation; they quickly pass through it; "their robes are washed white in the "blood of the Lamb," and they are admitted, for his sake, before the throne. Should I be asked to draw the line, to assign the age at which children begin to be accountable for actual sin, it would give me no pain to confess my ignorance. "The Lord knoweth."

2. A people hidden among the most degenerate communities, civil or ecclesiastical, that bear the name of Christian, where ignorance and superstition, or errors which, though more refined, are no less contrary to the Gospel, have a prevailing dominion and influence. What can be more deplorable, in the view of an enlightened and benevolent mind, than the general state of the Roman and Greek churches? where the traditions, inventions, and doctrines of men, a train of pompous and burdensome ceremonies, a dependence upon masses, penance, and pilgrimages, upon legends and fictitious saints, form the principal features of the public religion. Many nations are involved in this gross darkness, but they are not wholly destitute of the Scripture; some portions of it are interwoven with

learning and by numbers, which are not more con
able to the standard of the New Testament tha
grossest errors of Popery; and yet, here and there
sons may be met with, who, by the agency of the
Spirit enabling them to understand the Scripture
made wiser than their teachers; and who, thoug
fettered by some mistakes and prejudices, give evi
in the main, that their hopes are fixed upon the
atonement, that they are redeemed to God, ar
partakers of that faith which worketh by love, p
the heart, and overcometh the world.

3. I will go one step further. The inference
have been made by some persons from the a
Peter's words, "That God is no respecter of pe
"but in every nation, he that feareth him, and wo
"righteousness, is accepted with him*," are und
edly rash and unscriptural. They would con
from thence, that it is of little importance what p
believe, provided they are sincere in their way
the idolatrous Heathens, even the most savage of
whose devotion is cruelty, who pollute their w

tends to make the Gospel unnecessary; if they who have it not are therefore excusable, though they neither love nor fear God, and live in open violation of the law of their nature. The declaration, that "without "holiness no man shall see the Lord*," holds universally, and without a single exception. But if we suppose a Heathen, destitute of the means of grace by which conversion is usually wrought, to be brought to a sense of his misery, of the emptiness and vanity of worldly things, to a conviction that he cannot be happy without the favour of the great Lord of the world, to a feeling of guilt, and a desire of mercy; and that, though he has no explicit knowledge of a Saviour, he directs the cry of his heart to the unknown Supreme, to this purport, *Ens entium, miserere mei*,—Father and source of beings, have mercy upon me! who will prove that such views and desires can arise in the heart of a sinner, without the energy of that Spirit which Jesus is exalted to bestow? Who will take upon him to say, that his blood has not sufficient efficacy to redeem to God a sinner who is thus disposed, though he has never heard of his name? Or who has a warrant to affirm, that the supposition I have made is, in the nature of things, impossible to be realized? But I stop—I do not often amuse you with conjecture. And though, for want of express warrant from Scripture, I dare not give the sentiments I have now offered a stronger name than probable or conjectural, I hope I do not propose them for your amusement. They will prove to your advantage and my own, if they are helpful to guard us against a narrow, harsh, and dogmatical spirit; and if, without abating our reverent submission to the revealed

* Heb. xii. 14.

will of God, they have a tendency to confirm our views of his goodness, and the power and compassions of the great Redeemer.

SERMON XLIX.

THE CHORUS OF ANGELS.

REVELATION v. 12.

Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing!

IT was a good report which the queen of Sheba heard, in her own land, of the wisdom and glory of Solomon. It lessened her attachment to home, and prompted her to undertake a long journey to visit this great king, of whom she had heard so much. She went, and she was not disappointed. Great as the expectations were which she had formed from the relation made her by others, they fell short of what she saw and heard herself, when she was admitted into his presence. Good, likewise, is the report of the Gospel. It has a powerful effect upon those who receive it by faith. It is abundantly sufficient to convince them of the comparative insignificance of all that they most admired and esteemed in this world. From that hour they become strangers and pilgrims upon earth. They set out, in the way God has prescribed, in hopes of seeing Him who is greater than Solomon; and the report they have heard of him is their subject, their song, and their joy, while they *are on their* journey, and their great support under the

difficulties they meet with on the road. What then will it be to see him as he is? As yet, the one half is not told them: or, at least, they are not yet capable of conceiving the half, or the thousandth part, of what they read in the Scripture, concerning his wisdom, his glory, and his grace. We weaken, rather than enlarge, the sense of such a passage as this, by our feeble comments. We must die before we can understand it. To the bulk of mankind, "Wait the great teacher death," is cold, is dangerous advice. If they are not taught by the Gospel while they live, the teaching of death will be too late. Dreadful will be the condition of those who cannot be convinced of their mistakes, till repentance and amendment will be impracticable. But death will be a great teacher indeed to a believer; he will then know more by a glance, and in a moment, of the happiness he is now expecting, than by all he could collect from the inquiry and experience of a long course of years, in this world.

The scenery of this chapter, if attentively considered, is sufficient to snatch our thoughts from the little concernments of time, and to give us some anticipation of the employments and enjoyments of heaven. Come, all ye that are wearied and burdened with afflictions and temptations, look up, and for a while, at least, forget your sorrows! The Lamb is upon his throne, surrounded by a multitude of his redeemed people, who once were afflicted and burdened like yourselves; but now all tears are wiped from their eyes. They have a song peculiarly their own, and are represented as taking the first and leading part in worship and praise. The angels cannot sing their song, they were not redeemed to God by his blood; but they are interested in the subject. Their highest views of the manifold wisdom of God are

derived from the wonders of redemption. Therefore they join in the chorus, "Worthy is the Lamb that was "slain, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and "strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing." If you have an humble hope of bearing a part in this immortal song, will you hang down your heads like a bulrush, because you have the honour of following your Lord through many tribulations to his kingdom?

The number of the angels is expressed indefinitely, ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, myriads and millions, to intimate to us that, with respect to our capacities and conceptions, they are innumerable. Their number is known to him who "telleth the number of the stars, and calleth them all "by their names*," and to him only. The Scripture intimates a diversity of ranks and orders among them, "Thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers;" but, as to particulars, there is little said that might gratify our curiosity. It is enough for us to know, that the highest of them, and that all of them, worship him who is clothed in our nature. My text expressly informs us, that the object of their worship "is the Lamb that was slain." Not that the humanity of Christ, which is but a creature, is, simply and formally, the object of their worship; but they worship him who has assumed the human nature into personal union with himself; "God manifest in "the flesh," God in Christ. Though the world censure or despise us for "honouring the Son as we honour the "Father†," we have here a good precedent, as we have, in many places of Scripture, the warrant of an express command. Whether men are pleased or not, we will,

* Psal. cxlvii. 4. † John v. 23.

we must, worship the Lamb that was slain. To animate our devotion, let us thankfully consider, why he was slain, and how he was slain.

I. Why he was slain. The redeemed say, "For "us." "He loved us, and washed us from our sins "in his own blood*." They were sinners and enemies; they were slaves to sin and Satan; yet he loved them, and died to redeem them. It is by virtue of his blood and death that they are now before the throne. Nothing less than his death could have made them duly sensible of their misery; nothing less could have relieved them from it. He was lifted up upon the cross, that, by the powerful magnetism of his dying love, he might, in the hour of his grace, draw their hearts to himself†. This was the design, this was the effect, of his sufferings. A crucified Saviour, though a stumbling-block to the self-righteous, and foolishness to vain reasoners, was to them the power and the wisdom of God for salvation. They looked unto him, and were enlightened; they trusted in him, and were not ashamed. By faith in his name, they obtained peace with God, they renounced the ways of sin, they warred the good warfare, they overcame the world; and were at length made more than conquerors. For his sake they endured the cross, and despised the shame. They met with bad treatment from the world; but it was from the world that crucified him. While they were here, their characters were obscured by their own imperfections, and by the misrepresentations and reproaches of their enemies. But now their reproach is removed, and "they shine, each one like the sun, in the kingdom of "their Father‡." What an immense constellation of

* Rev. i. 5. † John xii. 32. ‡ Matth. xiii. 43.

sons! This their full salvation was the joy set before him, for the sake of which he became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. And now they see him as he is, they ascribe all their victories and honours to him, and unite in one song of endless praise to the Lamb that was slain.

II. Their praises are heightened, when they consider, How he was slain. He did not die a natural death; "He was slain." Nor did he fall like a hero, by an honourable wound in the field of battle. The impression which the death of the late general Wolfe made upon the public, is not yet quite forgotten. He conquered for us; but it cost him his life. But he died honourably, and was lamented by his country. Not so the Lamb of God. He died the death of a slave, of a malefactor. Cruelty, malice, and contempt, combined to give his sufferings every possible aggravation. And, after he was slain, very few laid it to heart. The world went on as it did before, as though nothing extraordinary had happened. But on this dark ground, the perfections of God were displayed in their fullest lustre; and they are the perfections of the great Redeemer, and therefore distinctly ascribed to him by the angels in the words which follow—"Power, and wisdom, and riches, "and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing."

Though each of these words have a distinct sense, a nicety in defining them, and stating their precise meaning, is of less importance than to feel the combined efficacy of them all, to impress our hearts with sentiments of reverence, confidence, and love. The fulness of expression may teach us, that every kind of excellence is the indubitable right and possession of the Lamb that was slain. He is worthy to have them all attri*buted to* him in the most absolute sense, and conse-

quently worthy of our adoration, dependence, and praise.

1. "Power." It is spoken once, yea, twice we have heard the same, that "power belongeth unto God*." It belongeth to him eminently and exclusively. All the power of creatures is derived from him. Such is the power of the lamb. He styles himself ὁ παντοκράτωρ †, the Omnipotent, the Upholder and Possessor of all things. He exerciseth this power in the human nature‡. "He doeth what he pleaseth in the armies of "heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; "and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What "doest thou§?" He has, therefore, all-sufficiency, and uncontrollable authority, for the discharge of his office, as the Mediator and Head of his church. The divine perfections, being infinite, are not distinct in themselves, though the Scripture, in condescension to our weakness, authorizes us to speak of them as distinguishable. God is one. And the "power" which can preserve and govern the world, involves in the idea of it every other excellence, which are separately mentioned in this passage.

2. "Wisdom." He is "the only wise God, and "our Saviour‖." His knowledge is perfect, his plan is perfect. In himself he is essentially the wisdom of God**, and he is our wisdom††. It is "life eternal to "know the only true God‡‡," and therefore it is life eternal to "know Jesus Christ whom he hath sent." For he is the only way, and the only door, to this knowledge; no one can come unto God, or attain to any

* Psal. lxii. 11. † Rev. i. 8. 11. ‡ Matth. xxviii. 18.
§ Dan. iv. 35. ‖ Jude 25. ** Prov. viii. 22.
†† 1 Cor. i. 30. ‡‡ John xvii. 3.

just conceptions of him, but in and by the Son of his love, who so perfectly represents God to us, is so completely the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, that whoso hath seen him, "hath "seen the Father*." By him is opened to us, the unsearchable wisdom of the divine counsels, particularly in the great work of redemption. "No one hath seen "God at any time; the only begotten Son who is in "the bosom of the Father, he hath revealed him†." It is by wisdom communicated from him, that his people are made wise unto salvation. Though there are few scholars and philosophers among them, and many of them are despised for their ignorance and weakness, yet, in truth, they have all a good understanding, for they know the Lord and his will; they know wherein their proper happiness consists, and how it is to be obtained. They are instructed, how to walk and to please God, how to bear afflictions with patience, and to meet death with composure. This wisdom is far superior to that of the schools. But He bestows and maintains it. The eyes of their mind are opened, and they see by his light; but they have no light of their own, or in themselves. They wait upon him for direction in every difficulty, for the solution of every hard question which perplexes their spirits; and he makes the crooked straight, teaches them to avoid the snares that are laid for them, or extricates them when entangled. Therefore in time, and to eternity, they will admire and adore his wisdom.

3. "Riches." All the stores of mercy, grace, and comfort are in him, as light in the sun, or water in the ocean. The apostle, speaking "of the unsearchable

* John xiv. 9. † John i. 18.; xv. 15.

" riches of Christ*," gives us the idea of a mine, the height, length, depth, and breadth of which cannot be investigated, nor the immense wealth it contains exhausted. Of this fulness the poor are invited to receive freely, and multitudes from age to age have been enriched, and the treasure is still undiminished. None are sent away empty; and when all have been supplied, it will be full as at first.

4. " Strength:" that energy and efficacy of his power, by which he accomplishes his holy purposes. Who can conceive of this? How just is the Psalmist's reasoning, " He that formed the eye, shall he not see? " He that planted the ear, shall he not hear†?" So we may say, How strong is he from whom all created strength is derived, and before whom the strength of all creatures, if collected into one effort, would be as chaff before the whirlwind! The Lord of all power and might speaks, and it is done; he commandeth, and it standeth fast. Though the waves of the stormy sea toss themselves, they cannot prevail‡; he checks them in the height of their rage, setting bounds to their violence which they cannot pass, saying, " Hitherto shalt " thou come and no further, and here shall thy proud " billows be stayed§." With equal sovereignty, certainty, and ease, he rules over moral agents. He formed the heart of man, and he can fill it with terror or with comfort in a moment, in any assignable circumstances. He can make it happy in a dungeon‖, or impress it with dismay and despair upon a throne**. All hearts are thus incessantly under his influence. And the hedge of his promise and protection surrounds

* Eph. iii. 8. † Psal. xciv. 9. ‡ Psal. xciii. 3, 4.
§ Job xxxviii. 10, 11. ‖ Act. xvi. 25. ** Dan. v. 5, 6.

those who trust in him, as with mountains and walls of brass and fire, impenetrable to the assaults of the powers of darkness, unless so far as he, for wise and holy ends, is pleased to give permission. With the arm of his strength he "upholdeth them that are fall-"ing, and raiseth up them that are bowed down*;" and is, in one and the same instant, a present and immediate help in trouble to all who call upon him†. Therefore they that abide under his shadow are safe; they pass unhurt through floods and flames, because their Redeemer is strong. And when, in defiance of all their enemies, he has brought them together in his heavenly kingdom, they will, with one consent, ascribe unto the Lord glory and strength.

5. "Honour." He is the fountain of it. All the honour of his creatures, and of his people, is from him; as the sun beautifies and gilds the objects he shines upon, which, without him, are opaque and obscure. Because his people are precious in his sight, they are honourable. "He clothes them with the garments of "salvation, covers them with a robe of righteousness, "as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, as "a bride adorneth herself with jewels‡." But who can speak of his own inherent honour, as God-man and Mediator! We must wait till we see him, without a cloud or vail, receiving the homage and adoration of angels and men. For as yet the one half cannot be told us! Then, however, it will be universally known, that he who possesses the fulness of wisdom and power, riches and strength, is worthy to receive all honour. Ah! how different will he then appear, from that humble form he once assumed, when, for our sakes, he was

* Psal. cxlv. 14. † Psal. xlvi. 1. ‡ Isa. lxi. 10.

a man of sorrows, despised, rejected, and nailed to the ignominious cross!

6. "Glory." The manifestation of God, that by which he is known and magnified, in the view of finite intelligences; the result, the combined effulgence of his holiness, grace, wisdom, truth, and love: this is his glory, and this glory is revealed and displayed in Christ. He is glorious in his works of creation and providence, but these do not fully exhibit his character. But in the Lamb upon the throne his glory shines, full orbed. And all in heaven, and all in earth, who behold it, take up "the song of Moses and the Lamb," "Who is "like unto thee, O Lord? who is like unto thee? "glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing won- "ders! Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord "God Almighty! just and true are thy ways, thou "King of saints† !"

7. "Blessing." He is the author of all blessings, of all the happiness and good which his people receive, and he is the deserved object of their universal praise. The different senses in which we use the word "bless- "ing," taken together, may express that intercourse or communion which is between the head and the mystical members of his body. He blesses them effectually with the light of his countenance, with liberty, grace, and peace. He blesses them daily. His mercies are renewed to them every morning. He will bless them eternally. "Blessed are the people who have this "Lord for their God." They can make him no suitable returns, yet in their way they bless him. They admire, adore, and praise him. They call upon all the powers of their souls to bless him. They proclaim his

* Exod. xv. 11. † Rev. xv. 3.

goodness, and that he is worthy to receive the ascription of power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. In proportion to their attainments in this delightful exercise of worship, love, and gratitude, they enjoy a heaven upon earth; and to stand before him continually, to behold his glory, to live under the unclouded beams of his favour, and to be able to bless and praise him as they ought, without weariness, abatement, interruption, or end, is what they mean when they speak of the heaven they hope for hereafter. Such is the blessedness of those who have already died in the Lord. They see his face, they drink of the rivers of pleasure which are at his right hand, they cast down their crowns before him, and say, Thou art worthy.—"Let us not be slothful, "but followers of them who, through faith and pa- "tience*," have finished their course, and are entered into the joy of their Lord.

Of all this glory and honour the Scripture declares the Lamb that was slain to be worthy. Wisdom, riches, and strength, are his. His power is infinite, his authority supreme. He is the author and giver of all good. He has life in himself, and he is the life of all that live; the Lord and Head of the church, and of the universe. Can language express, or can heart conceive, a higher ascription and acknowledgment than this? Can all this be due to a creature, to one of a derived and dependent character? Then surely the Scripture would have a direct tendency to promote idolatry. Far be the thought from us! The Scripture teaches us the knowledge of the true God, and the worship due to him. Therefore MESSIAH, the Lamb

* Heb. vi. 12.

that was slain, is the true God, the proper and immediate object of the worship of angels and of men.

Let us, therefore, take up a lamentation for those who slight the glorious Redeemer, and refuse him the honour due to his name. Their mistake should excite, not our anger or scorn, but our pity and prayers. Are there any such amongst us? Alas, my fellow-sinners, you know not what you do! Alas, you know him not, nor do you know yourselves! I am well aware that a thousand arguments of mine will not persuade you; but I can simply tell you what would soon make you at least desirous of adopting our sentiments upon this subject. If he who has that power over the heart which I have been speaking of, was pleased to give you this moment a sense of the holiness and authority of God, and of your conduct towards him as his creatures, your strongest objections to the high honours we attribute to the Saviour would this moment fall to the ground; and you would be immediately convinced, that either Jesus Christ is the true God and eternal life, or that you must perish. You would no longer expect mercy, but in a way perfectly consonant with the righteousness and truth of God, declared in his word, and with the honour and purity of his moral government. This would lead you to perceive the necessity of an atonement, and the insufficiency of any atonement, but that which the Lamb of God has made by the sacrifice of himself*; and that the efficacy even of his mediation depends upon his divine character. The Scriptural doctrines of the depravity of man, the malignity of sin, the eternal power and Godhead of the Saviour, the necessity and efficacy of his mediation,

* Heb. ix. 26.

and the inevitable, extreme, and endless misery of those who finally reject him, are so closely connected, that if the first be rightly understood, it will open the mind to the reception of the rest. But, till the first be known and felt, the importance and certainty of the others will be suspected, if not openly denied.

Though the doctrines I have enumerated are, in these sceptical days, too generally disputed and contradicted, I am fully confident that it is impossible to demonstrate them to be false. Upon the lowest supposition, therefore, they possibly may be true; and the consequences depending upon them, if they should be found true at last, are so vastly momentous, that even the peradventure, the possibility of their truth, render them deserving of your most serious consideration. Trifle with yourselves no longer. If they be truths, they are the truths of God. Upon the same authority stands the truth of that gracious promise, that he will give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him. Let me entreat you to make the experiment. This is the proper point to begin with. Instead of indulging reasonings and speculations, humble yourselves before the Lord, and pray for the light and influence which he has said he will afford to them who are willing to be taught Read the Scripture with deliberation, and do not labour to fortify yourselves against conviction. Break off from those practices, which your own consciences admonish you cannot be pleasing to him who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. "Then shall you know, if you will "sincerely follow on to know the Lord*." But if not, if you will, in a spirit of levity, presume to decide upon points which you will not allow yourselves seriously to

* Hos. vi. 3.

examine, should you at last perish in your obstinacy and unbelief, your ruin will be of yourselves. You have been faithfully warned, and we shall be clear of your blood.

SERMON L.

THE UNIVERSAL CHORUS.

REVELATION v. 13.

[*And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I, saying,*] *Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever.*

MEN have generally agreed to dignify their presumptuous and arrogant disquisitions on the works and ways of God with the name of wisdom; though the principles upon which they proceed, and the conclusions which they draw from them, are, for the most part, evident proofs of their depravity and folly. Instead of admiring the effects of his wisdom and power in the creation, they have rashly endeavoured to investigate the manner of its production. A variety of hypotheses have been invented to account for the formation of the world, and to state the laws by which the frame of nature is governed; and these different and inconsistent accounts have been defended with a magisterial tone of certainty, and an air of demonstration, by their respective authors, as though they had been by-standers and spectators, when God spoke all things into being, and pro-

duced order out of confusion by the word of his power. They have, however, been much more successful in showing the absurdity of the schemes proposed by others, than in reconciling their own to the sober dictates of plain common sense.

But if, by indulging their speculations on the creation of the world, the causes of the deluge, and similar subjects, their employment has been no better than "weaving spiders' webs;" the result of their reasoning on morals has been much worse. Here they have, with much industry, "hatched cockatrice' eggs*;" and their labours have been not only fallacious, but mischievous. Their metaphysical researches, while they refuse the guidance of revelation, if pursued to their just consequences, will always lead into the labyrinths of scepticism, weaken the sense of moral obligation, rob the mind of the most powerful motives of right conduct, and of the only consolations which can afford it solid support in an hour of trouble. One insuperable difficulty which they will undertake to solve, though it does not properly lie in their way, is concerning the origin of evil. That evil is in the world, is felt and confessed universally. The Gospel points out an effectual method of deliverance from it; but, alas! the simple and infallible remedy is neglected, and men weary themselves with vain inquiries,

> And find no end, in wand'ring mazes lost.

The more they reason, the more they involve themselves in uncertainty and error, till at last they make [illegible] their refuge, and adopt, with implicit credulity, as

* Isa. lix. 5.

so many undoubted axioms, opinions which are equally dishonourable to God, and contradictory to truth and experience*. Thus much is certain, that by the occasion of evil, the character of God is manifested with superior glory to the view of angels and men, who are in a state of holiness and allegiance, and a higher accent is thereby given to their praises; for now his justice and his mercy, which could not have been otherwise known, are revealed in the strongest light; and the redemption of sinners affords the brightest display of his wisdom and love.

The redeemed are represented as taking the first part in this sublime song, verse 8—10. The angels join in the chorus, verse 11, 12, which now becomes universal. All the angels, all the saints upon the earth, in the state of the dead, or *hades*, whether their bodies are buried under the earth, or in the sea, with one heart, aim, and voice, unite in worship and praise. In the preceding verse, "Blessing, and honour, and glory, "and power," are ascribed unto the Lamb; but here the ascription is "unto Him that sitteth upon the "throne, and unto the Lamb." I shall not add to what I have already observed to you from the words of the doxology. A few remarks, which offer from this verse, taken in connexion with the former, will bring me to a conclusion of the whole subject. And, oh! for a coal of fire from the heavenly altar to warm your hearts and mine, that our love, joy, and gratitude, may be awakened into lively exercise, and that the close of our meditations on the *Messiah* may leave us deeply impressed with desires and well-grounded hopes of meeting ere long before the throne, to join with the

* 2 Thess. ii. 11.

angels and the redeemed in singing the praise of God and the Lamb!

I. The Lord Jesus is not only the head of the church redeemed from among men, but of the whole intelligent creation that is in willing subjection to God. It belonged to his great design "to gather together in one*," (to reduce under one head, as the Greek impression is,) even in himself, "all things that are in heaven and upon "earth." He is the Lord and the life both of angels and of men. Mutability and dependence are essential to the state of creatures, however exalted; and the angels in glory owe their preservation and confirmation in holiness and happiness to him. Hence they are styled "the elect angels†," in distinction from those who left their first habitation, and sunk into sin and misery. Angels, therefore, constitute a branch of that great family, which is named of him in heaven and earth. And, having made peace by the blood of his cross, he has effected a reconciliation, not only between God and sinners, but also between angels and men. How those inhabitants of light are disposed to sinful men, considered as sinful, we may learn from many passages of Scripture. They are devoted to God, filled with zeal for his honour, and wait but for his command to execute vengeance upon his enemies. When Herod, infatuated by his pride and by the flattery of the multitude, received their idolatrous compliment with complacence, "an angel of the Lord smote him, "because he gave not God the glory‡." The pestilence which destroyed the people towards the end of David's reign, was under the direction of an angel§, and David

* Eph. i. 10.
† 1 Tim. v. 21.
‡ Acts xii. 23.
§ 2 Sam. xxiv. 16, 17.

saw him with his arm stretched out against Jerusalem. And in this prophecy angels are spoken of as employed in pouring forth the vials of wrath upon the earth. And still they are ready, we may believe, to avenge their Maker's cause upon the wicked, when they are commissioned. And if the history of modern times was written by an inspired pen, and events, as in the Scriptures, were assigned to their proper causes, perhaps the death of many a haughty worm would be recorded in words to this effect—"And an angel of the "Lord smote him, because he gave not God the "glory." But, viewing sinners as the subject of redemption, the angels copy from their Lord. They regard them with benevolence, and rejoice over every one that repenteth. They willingly attend to them, and assist them, in ways beyond our conception*. They esteem believers in Jesus as their fellow-servants†. We have reason to think, that they are present in our worshipping assemblies; and, perhaps, always so present, that they could discover themselves to us in a moment, were it consistent with the rules of the divine government, established in this lower world, suited to the state of those who are to walk by faith, not by sight. Thus far, however, differing in other respects, the angels and the redeemed are united and related in one common head, and have fellowship in worship and service. When sinners are enabled by grace to renounce this world, they are admitted to an honourable alliance with a better.

II. From hence we may form some judgment of the true nature and high honour of that spiritual worship, which is the privilege and glory of the church of God,

* Heb. i. 14. † Rev. xxii. 9.

under the Gospel dispensation. When we meet in the name of Jesus as his people, and with a due observance of his institutions, we come to the "innumerable com-"pany of angels, and to the general assembly and "church of the first-born*," the first-born ones, (for the expression is plural.) We draw nigh by faith, to the very gate of heaven, to the holiest of all. Men, unacquainted with spirituality, are soon weary even of the form of worship, unless their minds are amused by a splendid ceremonial. The first rise and subsequent increase of that pomp and pageantry, which, in some countries, has quite obscured the simplicity and beauty of the Gospel-worship, is to be ascribed to this disposition of the human mind. Our thoughts, while we are in a natural state, are too weak and wavering, and too gross, to be pleased with a worship in which there is nothing suited to affect the imagination by sensible objects. And, therefore, when men think themselves wise, and profess to despise the pageantry which captivates the vulgar, their wisdom affords them no real advantage, if they have nothing better to substitute in the room of what they reject as insignificant. The very appearance of devotion will languish, they will grow remiss, and neglect the Sabbath and public assemblies, for want of something to keep up their attention. We have abundant proof of this in our own land, and at this time. Protestants pride themselves in not being Papists; but, when the Protestant religion is understood to mean no more than a renunciation of the superstitious ceremonies of the church of Rome, it is, with respect to individuals, little, if at all, better than Popery itself. Among us enlightened Protestants, no expedient but preaching the

* Heb. xii. 22, 23.

Gospel of Christ will be found sufficient to retain people in a stated observance of the Lord's day. But true believers who understand, and love the Gospel, do indeed draw nigh to God; and they account "a day in "his courts better than a thousand*," because they can take a part in the songs of heaven, and in spirit and in truth, worship him "that sitteth upon the throne, and "the Lamb who redeemed them to God by his blood." They know, by happy experience, that his promise, to be in the midst of those who assemble in his name, is truth. Their worship is not a mere bodily service, a lifeless form, a round of observances, which neither warm the heart, nor influence the conduct; but they are instructed, comforted, and strengthened, by waiting upon God. Their spiritual senses are exercised; they behold his glory in the glass of the Gospel, they hear his voice, they feel an impression of his power and presence, they taste his goodness, and the virtue of that name which is as ointment poured forth, perfumes their tempers and conversation.

III. Though the Lamb is worthy of all blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, there is a distinct ascription of praise to him that sitteth upon the throne.

The scripture, which alone can teach us to form right conceptions of God, and to worship him acceptably, guides us in a medium, between opposite errors and mistakes. Too many persons, ignorant of their own state as sinners, and of the awful majesty and holiness of the Most High, presume to think of him, to speak of him, and, in their way, to speak to him, without being aware of the necessity of a Mediator. But they who

* Psal. lxxxiv. 10.

are without Christ, who is the only door and way to the Father, are without God, atheists, in the world*. There is a mistake likewise on the other hand, when, though the Deity of the Saviour be acknowledged, yet what we are taught of the ineffable distinction in the Godhead, is not duly attended to. It is written, "In the begin-"ning,—the Word was God†." It is likewise written, "the word was with God." This latter expression undoubtedly has a meaning, which, though perfectly consistent, is not coincident with the former. The truth contained in it is proposed, not to our curiosity as the subject of speculation, but to our faith. I do not attempt to explain it. But what God expressly declares we are bound, upon the principles of right reason, to believe. For he is Truth, and cannot deceive us. "There are three that bear record in heaven, the Fa-"ther, the Word, and Holy Spirit‡." These three are frequently spoken of in the Scripture—to each of them a distinct part in the economy of salvation is ascribed: to each of them the perfections and honours of Deity are attributed. Yet there are not three Gods, but one. Consequently, these three are one God. This doctrine may be above our comprehension, but cannot be contrary to our reason, if it be contained in a revelation from God. If it be simply received, upon the authority of the Revealer, it approves itself to be true, for it is found to be a key to the whole Scripture, which renders the general sense and scope every where consistent and plain. They who proudly reject it, and yet admit the Bible to be a divine revelation, are involved in difficulties from which all their sagacity and learning cannot free them. In vain they labour by singular in-

* Eph. ii. 12. † John i. 1. ‡ 1 John v. 7.

terpretations, by the minutiæ of criticism, and by an appeal to various readings and ancient versions, which, in a few passages, differ from the copies more generally received—in vain they endeavour by these refinements, to relieve themselves, when pressed by the obvious and natural sense of a thousand texts, which confirm the faith and hope of plain Christians. The Gospel is designed for the poor. But the poor and unlearned would be at a great disadvantage, if the Scripture could not be rightly understood, without the assistance of such learning and such criticism as we often see pressed into the service. But the Holy Spirit graciously leads those who pray for his teaching, into such views of this high subject as are sufficient to comfort their hearts, and to animate their obedience. The faith of those who are taught of God, is exercised in their approaches to him under two different modifications. Both are Scriptural, and therefore both are safe, and witnessed to by his gracious acceptance and blessing.

1. They come to God by Christ. They have access through him*. Unworthy to speak for themselves, they bow their knees in his name†. Christians are sufficiently distinguished and described by saying, "They come to "God by him‡." They come to God, they cannot live without him in the world, as they once did. They are now conscious of wants and desires, which only God can satisfy; but they are conscious likewise, that they are sinners, and therefore they durst not approach him, if they had not the invitation of his promise, and an assurance of "an advocate with "the Father§."

2. They come to God in Christ. He is the great

* Eph. ii. 18. † Phil. ii. 10. ‡ Heb. vii. 25. § 1 John ii. 1.

temple, in whom the "all-fulness dwells*;" and they are not afraid of idolatry, when they worship and honour the Son even as the Father. This distinct application to God, in the person of the Son of his love, perhaps becomes more frequent and familiar, as they advance in the knowledge of their Lord and Saviour†. They who seek to him for deliverance from sin and misery, at first, I believe, chiefly consider him as the Advocate and High Priest, who, by the virtue of his atonement, and the prevalence of his intercession, is able to save to the uttermost. But when the apostle distributes Christians, according to their growth in grace, into the state of babes, young men, and fathers‡, he speaks of a more distinct and appropriate knowledge of him who is from the beginning, as the peculiar privilege and distinguishing attainment of the fathers. He speaks of him that is from the beginning, so often, that we can be at no loss to determine whom he intends by the expression. He applies it to him who was in the beginning with God§, and whom he and the other apostles had heard, and seen with their eyes, and touched with their hands‖. An eminent divine** points out some special seasons in the Christian life, in which he thinks the peculiar pressures of the soul may obtain the most sensible and immediate relief, by direct application to the Saviour. But there are some believers who find themselves almost continually in one or other of the situations which he marks as occasional. However this may be, I am ready to take it for granted, that they who really and cordially believe the Deity of Christ, do, at least at some seasons,

*. Col. i. 19.; ii. 9.
† John ii. 13.
‡ 1 John ii. 1—.
‡ 2 Peter iii. 18.
§ 1 John i. 1.
** Owen in his Christologia

and upon some occasions, expressly direct their prayers to him. If precedents be required to warrant this practice, the New Testament will furnish them in abundance. I shall select but a few. The apostle Paul "bowed his "knees to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus;" but he often prayed to the Lord Jesus. He prayed to him in the temple*, and when he obtained that answer, "My grace is sufficient for thee†." To him the prayer of the apostles and disciples was addressed previous to the lot, which was to determine a successor to Judas‡. And to him Stephen committed his departing spirit§; an act of trust and worship of the highest kind, and at the most solemn season. In short, it is a strange inconsistence, if any, who acknowledge his Deity, question the propriety of praying to him. What is it, more or less, than to question the propriety of praying to God?

IV. This solemn worship and praise is referred ultimately to Him who sitteth upon the throne. To the great and glorious God, thus known and manifested in, and by, and with, the Lamb that was slain.

The mediatorial kingdom of Christ will have a period. He will reign as Mediator, till he has subdued all enemies under his feet, and perfected his whole work. Then his kingdom in this sense will cease; he will deliver it up to the Father, "that God may be all "in all‖." This passage is difficult, that is, the subject is too great for our faculties, in their present state of imperfection, fully to comprehend; for the difficulties we meet with in Scripture are more properly to be ascribed to our ignorance. The Son, as man, is even

* Acts xxii. 17—21. † 2 Cor. xii. 9. ‡ Acts i. 24.
§ Acts vii. 59. ‖ 1 Cor. xv. 28.

now subject to the Father; and God is undoubtedly all in all, at present, and from everlasting to everlasting. But his kingdom here is to be taken figuratively for the subjects of his kingdom, his people, whom he received as a trust and a treasure. These he will deliver up, and the form of his administration and government over them will be changed. They will then have no more sins to confess; there will be no more dangers requiring the care and tenderness of a shepherd, no enemies to be controlled, and the ordinances and means of grace, accommodated to their wants and weakness while in this world, will be no longer necessary. But MESSIAH, the Lamb that was slain, will ever be the head and Lord of the creation, the medium of communication of the light and love of God to his people; and God in him, the object of their eternal adoration and praise.

Then the grand, ultimate, final cause of all the manifestations of God, will be completely obtained. The glory of the great Creator and Lawgiver, the splendour of all his perfections, will for ever shine, without a veil or cloud, and with a brightness which could not have been known by creatures, had not the entrance of evil given occasion for a display of his wisdom and love, in over-ruling it to the praise of his glorious grace.

Thus, according to the measure of my ability and experience, I have endeavoured to point out to you the meaning and importance of the well-chosen series of Scriptural passages, which are set to music in the Oratorio of the *Messiah*. Great is the Lord MESSIAH, and greatly to be praised! I have attempted to set before you a sketch of what the Scripture teaches us *concerning* his person, undertakings, and success; the

misery of those whom he came to save, the happiness to which he raises them, and the wonderful plan and progress of redeeming love. But who is sufficient for these things? Alas! how small a portion of his ways are we able to trace! But I would be thankful, that the desire of attempting this great subject was put into my heart, and that having obtained help of God, I have been preserved and enabled to finish my design. Imperfect as my execution of it has been, I cannot doubt that the various topics I have been led to insist on are the great truths of God. For what is properly my own, the defects and weaknesses which mix with my best services, I entreat his forgiveness, and request your candour. But I do not hesitate to say, that the substance of what I have advanced deserves and demands your very serious attention.

It is probable, that those of my hearers who admire this Oratorio, and are often present when it is performed, may think me harsh and singular in my opinion, that of all our musical compositions, this is the most improper for a public entertainment. But while it continues to be equally acceptable, whether performed in a church or in the theatre, and while the greater part of the performers and of the audience are the same at both places, I can rate it no higher than as one of the many fashionable amusements which mark the character of this age of dissipation. Though the subject be serious and solemn in the highest sense, yea, for that very reason, and though the music is, in a striking manner, adapted to the subject, yet, if the far greater part of the people who frequent the Oratorio, are evidently unaffected by the Redeemer's love, and uninfluenced by his commands, I am afraid it is no better than a profanation of the name and truths of God, a crucify-

ing the Son of God afresh! You must judge for yourselves. If you think differently from me, you will act accordingly.—Yet, permit me to hope and to pray, that the next time you hear the *Messiah*, God may bring something that you have heard in the course of these sermons, nearly connected with the peace and welfare of your souls, effectually to your remembrance. I would humbly hope, that some persons, who were strangers to the power and grace of MESSIAH when I entered upon this service, are now desirous of seeking him with their whole hearts! Yes, I trust I have not laboured wholly in vain. The Gospel is "the rod of "his strength*," which, when accompanied by the power of his Spirit, produces greater effects than the wonder-working rod of Moses. It causes the blind to see, the deaf to hear, and the dead to live. A faithful minister will account a single instance of success a rich recompense for the labour of a life. May this joy be mine! May the Lord encourage you to go on seeking him! Then he will surely be found of you. An open door is set before you†; and if you are truly willing to enter, none shall be able to shut it.

But may I not fear, that I am still speaking to others, who, to this hour, have no cordial admiring thoughts of the great Saviour? Alas! should you die in your present frame of mind, let me, once more, entreat you to consider, what your situation and employment will be, when all his redeemed people, and all his holy angels, shall join in worshipping and praising him, in the great day of his appearance.

Unless you repent, lay down your arms, and submit to his golden sceptre, your doom is already pronounced.

* Psal. cx. 2. † Rev. iii. 8.

Awful are the words of the Lord, by the prophet, and very applicable to your case, if, (which may his mercy prevent!) you should die in your sins. "Therefore, "thus saith the Lord God, Behold, my servants shall "eat, but ye shall be hungry: behold, my servants "shall drink, but ye shall be thirsty: behold, my ser- "vants shall rejoice, but ye shall be ashamed: behold, "my servants shall sing for joy of heart, but ye shall "cry for sorrow of heart, and shall howl for vexation "of spirit*." If the Scribes and Pharisees were filled with envy and grief when the children in the temple sung Hosanna to the Son of David†; what must be their anguish and remorse, their rage and despair, when the "whole creation" shall join in his praise? If your thoughts of him now are like theirs, tremble at your danger; for unless you repent, your lot must be with them hereafter.

* Isa. lxv. 13, 14. † Matth. xxi. 15.

END OF THE FOURTH VOLUME.

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